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THE AGE;

A

Colloquial Satire.

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Revd. OWEN THOMAS, D. D.
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TO
THE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE,
BALA.
DECEMBER, 1891.

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THE AGE;

A

Colloquial Satire.

BY

PHILIP JAMES BAILEY,

AUTHOR OF "FESTUS."

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1858.

LONDON:
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

THE AGE;

A Colloquial Satire.

Interlocutors:—CRITIC, YOUNG AUTHOR, *and* MUTUAL FRIEND.

Scene—TOWN; AN EDITOR'S ROOM.

AUTHOR.

HERE are you two, no doubt in deep debate,
And close confab, upon affairs of state.

FRIEND.

By no means.

AUTHOR.

You are busy?

CRITIC.

Pray, sit down
Two hours for chat, still.

AUTHOR.

Then, you are leaving town?

CRITIC.

I am.

FRIEND.

I homewards, too. We "rail" together
Part of the way, at least.

AUTHOR.

This brilliant weather
Raises anticipations in my mind
Of country joys delicious in their kind.

CRITIC.

There's nothing like it for one's health, I find.
Unconquered Kent! I come to thee again—
Famous for cherries, apples, hops, strong men,
And pretty girls, and everything that's good,
And the Martello Towers, and underwood,
And Roman roads, and cricket; Shakspeare's Cliff,
And many other things, I dare say, if
I knew them, but I don't; and so, it ends,
With—famous for good dinners and good friends.

AUTHOR.

God speed you both. I fear I've cut the thread,
Like Atropos, of your discoursing, dead.

CRITIC.

No. We were merely skimming o'er the topics
Which fill men's mouths from England to the tropics,
And raise their wrath from Polar e'en to Torrid zone—
From Arctic to Antarctic (still more horrid zone)
Much as the flying fish pursues his way
On wing and fin, up and down, night and day,
In desultory movement.

FRIEND.

That's to say
From actions seeking motives we must tend
Backwards; and forwards, if we seek an end.

CRITIC.

But what's this scroll?

AUTHOR.

We'll speak about it afterwards—
As soon as I perceive your thoughts turn laughterwards.
One hour ago, I passed the great Leviathan—
That monstrous little craft, whose hull is higher than
The masts of most ships, looming 'mid the fogs,
Like a huge kennel for the Isle of Dogs;
And my thoughts darted, lightlike, o'er the seas
To India and her mutinous Sipahis—
That tyrant thought, which robs the land of ease,

And duly proves—for all we there have been—
There's nothing certain but the unforeseen.

CRITIC.

That is the question which has superseded,
Justly, all others, howsoe'er they needed
Discussion: church rates, ballot, and reform,
All veil their heads before the eastern storm.
And truly, as regards domestic policy,
Chiefly reform, I think we all the folly see,
Of hurrying on a constitutional question,
Which might endanger old Squire Bull's digestion.

FRIEND.

He's somewhat apoplectic; and we are undone
If all the country blood should fly to London.

CRITIC.

Whatever luck he had, or fortune missed,
There's no man happy like the egotist;
On what Bull deems his rights Bull will insist.

FRIEND.

Rather thickheaded sometimes as a nation,
But then his roar beats all bulls out of Bashan.

AUTHOR.

Then there's the Ballot.

CRITIC.

Ballot has its partizans,
The favourite makeshift of some timid artisans,
Who form, although a most important class,
One only segment of the social mass;
Wherein is seen, in all its odd variety,
That pudding-stone formation called Society.
Beside the Crown, the peers, and cleric hierarchy,
Law, army, navy, physic, state, and squirearchy,
Fundholders, landowners, farmers, bankers, millocrats,
Officials, manufacturers, merchants, tillocrats,
Called frequently by Chartists the shopocracy—
Most numerous of all ranks in our Democracy:
And numbering many good and thoughtful men,
Illustrious for plain dealing, now and then;
Clerks and assistants, labourers of every kind,—
Must have their rightful interests borne in mind.
Not all these ranks have votes, but all dispense
A broadly graduated influence;
And each, a petty despot in its way,
Striving to rule the whole, must yet obey
The general weal; consulting for the best
The will of others—workmen with the rest;

Well worthy every privilege but one,
Which Englishmen have granted yet to none—
To class, nor clique, nor king, nor kingly minion—
The privilege to quash free-spoke opinion.
So England's liberties, already got
By open vote, we will to change it not.

FRIEND.

Peers and electors are the two great powers
And legal ultimates in this land of ours;
The high contracting parties of the state,
Who balance and direct each other's weight:
All others may accountable be shown
Truly to these,—these, legally, to none.
But, morally responsible; due note
Is taken by the nation of each vote;
And justly, therefore, in the general sight,
A vote's a privileged trust, and not a right,
Common to every unconvicted wight.
Were manhood-suffrage law, the mass of men
Outside the franchise now, would outvote then
All other ranks, one thousand just to ten:
Whereby the opinions of all men beside
In favour of one class were nullified;
Make but that suffrage secret, and it would be
Society upturned, as far as could be.

Were this so, those reformers of our day,
Who favour secretly tyrannic sway,
And hold, with C., that for all social schism
The cure is a good grinding despotism,
And that some all o'erbearing will must be a—
For all diseases politic—panacea,
Are right. In my view, though not worth defending,
The vote wants raising rather than extending.

CRITIC.

There never was a Democratic state
But lost its ill-used freedom soon or late,
Whose scope is more and more to give dominion
To blind eyes, rude heads, and unripe opinion.

FRIEND.

In politics, as in the reasoning art,
Conclusions follow e'er the weakest part.

CRITIC.

Were men resolved, or worthy to be free,
What's to prevent them? Why should Britain be
The world's one instance of just liberty?

AUTHOR.

However free the world may find us here,
However just or liberal we appear,

Whatever hate to tyrants we have shown,
Abroad, we are the greatest tyrants known.
The policy of England is, abroad,
What best might suit a brigand race outlawed,—
As void of every sentiment of right;
'Twere just as if a friend should you invite
Into his house, and you, when once you put in it
Your nose, admit no thought but that of gutting it,
Stealing and slaughtering all he prizes most,
And end by turning out of doors your host.
In this way have we practised in the East,
Our subject states extended and increased;
Then, having seized their total territory,
Our saintly virtues and our martial glory
We make much boast of, and to all our neighbours
Parade our pure, commercial, christian labours.
The truth is, as a nation we're unjust,
Despotic, faithless, greedy, cursed with lust
Polygamous of all conterminous lands;
Had, more than's safe, desire still more demands;
We, just to keep our appetite supplied,
Annex a state, as Blue Beard Hal, a bride.
Whether we war with Kaffirs or Birmese,
Or thrust our poisonous stuff down throats Chinese,
Those nude barbarians, silk-clad warriors these,
Or moan for vengeance on our bended knees

With unctuous hypocrisy, the times
Are branded black and deep with Britain's crimes.
True 'tis, we have suffered deadly torts and wrongs,
But that's the sequence which to sin belongs.
We have no more right to claim retaliation
Than thief, from judge condemning, expiation:
Our own wrong-doing forms our condemnation.
But we, as murderous robbers in the first place,
Must next proceed to sanctify the accurst place;
And priests and prelates bellicose the realm
Parade, contending who shall most o'erwhelm
With anti-christian wrath the land we've seized,
And proved, with our injustice, Heaven displeased.
This Burke the righteous prophet once declared,
Though time, the threat reserved, the sinner spared.
While servile nations tarred with kindred sins
To England point,—"with her all ill begins."
Can we of Austrian tyranny complain?
The tender mercies of Cayenne disdain?
Or Freedom, fettered hand and foot in Spain?
Can we, who once a good example gave,
Taunt Uncle Sam with Uncle Tom, his slave?
Let Russia act towards each repugnant tribe
Worse than her paid official dares describe,
Our tongue is tied: no right have we to gibe.

Let Naples' king now point his bitter joke,
The Italian's easier than the British yoke:
Ireland, he says, was England's India first;
Her second Ireland, Ind; the last, the worst.

CRITIC.

The views, no doubt, of B., and C., and others
(Dear friends), you speak; but outraged nature smothers,
Indignant, all such plainly futile pleas,
In face of massacres and mutinies,—
What are Algerian horrors weighed with these?
No race on earth can make a clean confession
Of a pure, legal, peaceable possession,
Originally, of the lands they claim;
But all by force or fraudful inroad came
Into the place they occupy; at least
All but the savage islands of the East.
Duke William's conquest of the treacherous Saxon
Could never lay my sympathies a tax on,
Who on the wronger just those wrongs inflicted
The outraged Briton's seer had long predicted:
Rightly or wrongly thus we are lords of Ind.
That we have both done righteously and sinned
Under that head, I grant; and, for that matter,
I should not be surprised if most the latter.

Be this true, howe'er wrongfully obtained,
More rightfully the domination gained
We have administered, than India's seen
Since Sandrakottus or the Assyrian queen;
And to the million "who rules," matters less
Than "how ruled," as regards their happiness.

AUTHOR.

Rights are not based on such considerations;
And of their rights we, wrongful, rob these nations.
Our sway, if now imperilled, may we learn
On grace to found, and from injustice turn:
Acts, motives, ends, the Just One will discern.
And if we've robbed a man of all he owns,
House, dress, skin, carcass, let him pick his bones.

CRITIC.

'Tis true we shall regain it, and right soon,
As that the sun holds high and endless noon.
Mankind expects it of us; 'tis our place
To vindicate our own superior race:
The world succumbs before the white man's face.

FRIEND.

Certes,—but that sounds odd. When our forbears
Dwelt naked in dank caves and leaf-strewn lairs,

Stained blue with woad, and raddled with red clay,
(Which royal liveries even now display,)
On either breast the orbs of night and day;
When lions and hyenas roamed our land,
And mammoths stalked along the reedy Strand—

AUTHOR.

Where greater brutes (the critics) now command—

FRIEND.

This ancient people whom we so contemn
As our inferiors (we have mastered them),
Lived rich in science, art, religion, song:
Could boast of varied lore, and empire strong,
And truths we've not ourselves attained to long:
Knew the precise position of the sun
In utter space ere Britain's name begun:
Marked by precession of the equinoxes,
Three thousand years ere those first Christmas boxes
Were brought to Bethlehem by their kindred Magi;
Or Tityrus warbled 'neath his "*tegmen fagi*."

CRITIC.

In some things each of opposites is best;
Light's from the east and motion from the west;
To both we owe some pleasures 'tis confessed;—
Tactics and gunpowder explain the rest.

FRIEND.

Still, I am one to whom Old England's glorious
At all times; most of all when she's victorious.
One moment checked, the volume of her force
Enlarges, river-like, by length of course.
That changeless charm,—my country's only dower,—
Of pure success, and ever greatening power,
Hallows her cause; to me her flag endears,
Though sometimes stained with blood, and sometimes steeped
in tears.
Where, like to her, another will you find,
Next, under Heaven, great blesser of mankind?
If to Judæa we our worship trace;
If our best learning to Achaia's race;
If Europe owes to Rome her noblest laws;
The freedom of mankind is England's cause.
To law, to learning, to religion, she
Adds Heaven's own element of liberty.
She first refused with slavery to defile
Her shores; and God looked down and blessed the isle,
Saying "For this cause, England, go thou forth,
Thy fleets, thy hosts, thy peoples, round the earth;
Invincible thy banners as thy worth;
To lands less blessed unfold fair Freedom's charms;
Fear not the snares of peace, nor war's alarms,
And leave to Heaven the issue of thine arms."

AUTHOR.

If e'er the world should be to freedom won,
'Twill be by doing just as England's done;
Prudence most lies in being wise to shun;
Patient and steady, not too quickly wise;
(Wisdom is never won by a surprise),
Earning by slow degrees just liberties.
The paper constitutions Bentham drew,
And Canning backed, were never met when due.
The boasted balance which our statesman made,
The western evil 'gainst the east arrayed,
And anarchy 'gainst despotism weighed.
Cursed with the independence they desired,
With love of lawlessness alone inspired,
Those states still fight themselves, and will, till tired,—
Till proud, at last, they prove to lie or crawl
About the feet of power imperial.
The radicals of modern revolutions
Reverse the order of our institutions,
And of the way we got them. In our isle
'Tis popular power which crowns the social pile;
The base is monarchy. Now, they commence
With wild democracy, a sad offence
Against the very name of common sense;
And thus, instead of hewing out of rock,
Their deep foundations, proof against all shock—
Begin by gilding first their weathercock.

FRIEND.

But even now in England may be found
A tyranny that's greatly gaining ground;
Though less upon the ladder's lowest round
Than on the upper; the mid-classes most.
From filling, first, a very humble post,
The Typocrat now rules from coast to coast;
Who, rattling off a leader while you are winking,
Has almost stifled independent thinking.
As people pray in Tartary by machines,
So here by dailys, weeklys, magazines,
Each turns his wordy mill, which nothing means;
So deftly now the Press, of scribbling power,
Inflates the favourite folly of the hour;
Some grand delusion happily long covert,
But ripe at last for sale in market overt;
That when its influence seems most comprehensive,
Its worthlessness but shows the more extensive.
And this because its prosperousness depends
Not on its speaking truth, but making friends,
Sway o'er weak minds, and gain, its only ends.
Has ever one, when war-tide was at flood,
Called to the people—"Hold, friends! it were good,
Ere we commit our hands to blows or blood,
To scan those maxims which in cooler hours
We have maintained as Christians must be ours,
And conscience may admit as motive powers?"

Soon as the scent of blood first taints the air,
The sleuth hounds of the Press at once are there.
All philanthropic cant is cast away;
To rouse ill passions is to make them pay.
With polished pens and learning at command,
Although their reasoning rarely could withstand
A Sunday scholar's logic in the land,
Yet types the Press the body of the nation:
That is, the minds of mediocre station;
Nor e'er in wit, nor e'en in wish surpasses
The "Bedford level" of the middle classes.

AUTHOR.

Men like a glass which faithfully reflects
Such faults as even vanity detects.
There's nought we flatter more than our defects.
So bigotry, presumption, vengeance, crimes,
We load at Church with dreadful synonymes,
Are looked on with complacence in the 'Times;'
Who tells the million for their ghostly good,
How christian Britons "thirst for Nana's blood."
So Reverend Sirs, who every Sunday say,
"My brethren, bless your foes and for them pray,"
Discuss, on Saturday, in full-length column,
Large-typed and leaded, with effect right solemn,
The more ingenuous and recondite arts
Of butchering nations, wholesale, or in parts.

CRITIC.

In fallacy and folly nought surpasses
The dubious judgments formed of men by classes ;
But then the Christian is a pure ideal ;
Men in the Daily Press see men as real.

FRIEND.

And is't for this that thirteen thousand parishes,
Urban and rural, spread o'er hills, coasts, marishes,
Have each their pastor, so to inculcate,
Not how much to forgive, but how much hate ?
If so, how, therefore, differ we from heathen ?
Let christian pastors pastors christian be, then ;
Nor seek to inflame the passions of a land,
Both 'gainst the letter, as all understand,
And spirit of their Master's great command.

AUTHOR.

Sons of the sword ! indulge your sacred ire ;
Such vengeance wreak as justice may require.
Sternly your fatal duty execute,
Whether to spear, to sabre, or to shoot ;
But be those lips, whence grace and mercy, mute.

FRIEND.

Of all conceits mis-grafted on God's Word,
A christian soldier seems the most absurd.

That Word commands us so to act in all things,
As not to hurt another e'en in small things.
To flee from anger, hatred, bloodshed, strife;
To pray for, and to care for others' life.
A christian soldier's duty is to slay,
Wound, harass, slaughter, hack in every way
These men whose souls he prays for night and day;
With what consistency let prelates say.
He's told to love his enemies; don't scoff;
He does so; and with rifles picks them off.
He's told to do to all as he'd be done
By, and he therefore blows them from a gun;
To bless his foes, he "hangs them up like fun."
Such inconsistencies will men pretend;
Such blasphemous apostasies defend,
To slake a passion or to serve an end.
A soldier is a patriot: draws his sword
With right, with law, with honour in accord;
Fights down his foemen as a brave man should,
And, if a baptist, dips them deep in blood;
But scarce pretends he does it for their good.
For law and honour, far from Christianity,
Are rather proof of error, sin, and vanity.
Because a sin or error may be national,
It's not on that account a whit more rational,

Not to be tolerated, nor excusable;
Nor such an argument are we to use able,
That pride or power prefers a course, if sinful;
Of every vice be sure we have a skinful.
But we disguise the beverage as we please,
And virtue, say, has various aliases.
Our meannesses by lofty names we dignify,
As Jove and Juno may twin puppies signify;
And men condemn each other for the quality
They pride themselves the most on in reality.
Our sin we think lies not so much in this,
As in conceding we do aught amiss.

CRITIC.

Whoe'er has marked how questions ope and close
In certain seasons, cowslip-like or rose,
Knows nothing so annoys the weak as power.
When the 'Times' thunders the whole press turns sour,
Retorts, resists, perhaps strives to refute;
But they've their own luck, and their friend's to boot,
And, *nolens volens*, each must follow suit.

AUTHOR.

An editorial quid-nunc I once knew—
A deputy-sub-editor, like you;
A most superior man in his own view;
Quite competent to rule a state or two;—

(His eye was always turned on you intrusively,
An air acquired, to speak of it amusively,
By looking into millstones too exclusively—)
Told me a secret, a secret I shall not disclose,
As to who leads all England by the nose.

CRITIC.

Pray don't. The high arcana of our craft
Are not to be exploded fore and aft.

AUTHOR.

But it's a consolation still, to know,
The fact's recorded, and, not long ago;
That, as the sun stands not in debt to tapers,
Our late First Lord perused no daily papers;
He was not of the herd that lives on leaders,
Which class, says brave Sir Colin, are "foul feeders."

FRIEND.

Peers, as a class, perhaps breathe frëer air;
And a few sage old hawbucks, here and there,
Professors, parsons, magistrates, and men
Who can think, and will reason now and then;
Whose souls unmuddled by commanding views
Conceived by Septuagenarian Blues,
Reap rich contentment from their county news.

There's our Society, you have heard me say,
Formed five-and-twenty years ago this day;
We have our articles.

CRITIC.

Rehearse them, pray.

FRIEND.

We framed them when quite green; we keep them grey.

CRITIC.

I'm quite prepared for that. We all are seen
From youth to age in different suits of green.
There is our fine old tar, we often meet,
Who every year so dreads the French will gobble us,
And says, "I only ask you for a Fleet,"—
Like Belisarius begging for an obolus,—
"Five millions down, armed men and spirits neat;"
If he expects it, well, he's rather sea-green;
There's Yeh, and mild Sir John, both now quite tea-green;

FRIEND.

And there's yourself; you, certainly, are pea-green.

AUTHOR.

An eminent cats'-meat-monger in my neighbourhood,
Who lives a life of most melodious labourhood,

And cultivates the acquaintance of the mews
On a more stable footing than I use;
Informs me, as the most authentic news,
That, in the city, the impression's strong
We shall be all invaded before long;
And under cover of some two hours' fogs
A French fleet will send England to the dogs.

FRIEND.

What will be shall be, but it seems a game
Two well can play at; we'll serve them the same.
Still, one is half ashamed to see a nation
So smit with periodic palpitation,
And yelling out its fears of an invasion
From friends whose honour late we placed at high rates,
But whom we speak of now as worse than pirates.
When there was danger once we showed no fear,
And now there's none, what caves we must appear.
I'd rather say, "As many as can come
Are welcome; we'll provide each man a home,
Wherein he'll more attached grow to our soil
Than that he left when bound our own to spoil."
But what! is this the prudent solidarity
We hailed, which was to render war a rarity?
By war, nor governments nor peoples gain;
The only interest (useless 'twere to feign

Our ignorance of the fact) that wins by war,
Though half its time professing to abhor,
Is, now, the Press: wars, rumours, and alarms,
Success or failure of contending arms,
Its front invest with sanguinary charms.
So much the part they favour of belligerents
Now, our hot-blooded editors, refrigerants
Like right and reason are quite out of fashion,
While they run up the market price of passion,
Till both the combatants have bit the dust;
Then mark, I beg, their slowly cooling crust;
Until some future like occasion offers
To gull the mass and line their private coffers.

CRITIC.

There's nothing raises so the people's spite
As when you try to teach them what is right.
The popular mind has such a quackish turn
It can't conceive it possible to learn;
And if you mean the public grace to earn
You must assume their very thoughts, words, attitudes;
For Trade winds only blow in the low latitudes.

FRIEND.

So, to return to our Society;
Over life's voyage, stormy though it be,
The heart is mellowed, winelike by the sea.

Wherefore we are rather grim about the muzzle,
And hold the state of parties is a puzzle;
That statesmen now are much of an enigma,
And flourish most 'neath what was once a stigma;
And politics more and more like a conundrum,
Since "The Great Britain" first stuck fast off Dundrum.
My memory goes back to that iron age,
Far back, before Free Trade became the rage;
Or "The League" made its leg upon the London stage:
Or young Australia, girt with golden zone,
Untamed and free, first sat her maiden throne;
Or curry-powder was, by Norfolk's peer,
A succedaneum named for British beer.

AUTHOR.

Though in the judgment of our astral wits
And theologians, stern and lax by fits,
One hour's eclipse outweighs a year of light—
One deed of ill, a life of truth and right,
Because a man one foolish thing was fated
To say, shall he for it be always baited?

FRIEND.

Then came the fatal rot of the potatos,
Whereon so many Quakers spake like Platos;
Averring it was all the whiskey's fault,—
And murphies perished for the sins of malt.

But as they could not prove by Aristotle
Their point, they sighed, and called for t'other bottle.
Followed the year of rows and revolutions,
And outlawed patriots with weak constitutions,
Who, opening business by expelling kings,
Ended with suffering all sorts of things.
These are the men we hold, for Freedom's sake, fast,
Who can with pen a revolution make fast,
And draw up a republic while at breakfast;
Who vend sublime and harrowing proclamations
To unmapped empires and unheard of nations;
But who, when tested, ignorant we find
Both of their own and their compatriots' mind.

CRITIC.

Of course the "Little-go" of English Chartists,
In which they proved but very bungling artists,
Is hardly worth commemorating now.

FRIEND.

In fact, they lacked substratum for a row.
On abstract questions all have equal right,
And rich and poor like favour find in sight
Of law and faith; but when our private views
A bearing practical assume, we use
A different rule; demanding guarantees
For life, peace, property, and things like these.

A man's opinion of the rule of three
Matters not much, perhaps, to you or me;
Nor if he thinks the question he can solve,
As to the manner in which moons revolve;
We feed, work, trade, the same, though Rev. Ammon
(To me, his Biblical-Cottonian gammon
Seems just the thing denounced—read Luke—as mammon)
Proves that in Afric men their children suckle,
And, in some tribes, the sapient niggers knuckle
Down to the dusky ladies of creation;
The most momentous piece of information
His oracle relates of the black nation.
But when a man's opinions mean taxation,
Sedition, anarchy, or spoliation,
Why, then, we come to very different matters,
Say what we think, and neither of us flatters.
Next came the combat 'tween the bull of Rome
And our bull-headed Mino-taur at home.
Scarce does the Roman bull set foot on shore,
Than the land shakes with his defiant roar.
Was heard the answer next of the First Minister,
From Wick to Land's End (that's our English Finisterre).
Then grew the whole Press piously litigious,
Saints controversial, editors religious;
And, as a proof of policy prodigious,

The mayors of towns, whose names were hardly known,
Took worlds to witness they'd maintain the throne.
At last, the mountain kittened; we've a bill,
With two retractile clauses armed at will,
Which settles all things by remaining still,
And doing nothing with consummate skill.
Thus ends John Bull his spiritual duel,
And mourns in peg-tops and three-water-gruel.
High Church we are, and, somehow, rather hope
Something may sometime happen to the Pope;
Whose end, by prophets Protestant, appears
To have been due about three hundred years.
But spiritual power's both least and most;
And who on earth can grapple with a ghost?
It shrinks from one, it terrifies a host;
And one who takes three centuries to die,
Is, possibly, as hale as you or I.
Then came that great event, the Exhibition,
When England dared the world to competition.
As Robin Hood took no man in his band
But who had thwacked him till he scarce could stand,
So England welcomes to her willing shore
Each foreign grace that foils her o'er and o'er.
But still, I hold, we were triumphant seen
In iron, coal, and many a huge machine.

AUTHOR.

Peace-men had then their beatific vision;
And Art-schools were to render earth Elysian.

CRITIC.

But glass and iron vanished; and, it's clear,
Art-Education don't succeed on beer.
If popular art you want, live in some wine-land,
Whether it's France, or Italy, or Rheinland,
Which there you'll get; for touch and feeling fine
Towards gracious ends (true Art is half divine),
Ask for support a modicum of wine.

AUTHOR.

What England, as a nation, wants, is taste;
The judgment that's in due proportion placed;
We overdo, or underdo, or waste.
Look at that monstrous thing they call a statue,
On entering the old Abbey, staring at you.
Is it the genius of the British nation
Promoted to that marble exaltation,
Dwarfing all other objects by its size?
Or is't illustrative of legal lies?
(As finding on inquiry, I infer),
It represents a Chancery barrister.

A statesman? never sired nor nursed a law,
But skilled to find or to defend a flaw,
And featly argue pleas he could not draw.
While Pitt and Fox, each 'neath his plain grey stone,
Sleep side by side, unnoticed and unknown.
But these have higher fame than stone can give;
That deathless life the great elect to live,
Whose names are still as oft on the world's lips,
As ere they suffered death's divine eclipse.

CRITIC.

Can any one pass through Cheapside, nor feel
A pang of horror shoot from head to heel,
That caricature colossal of "Sir Peel,"
As he contemplates? *"Mais, c'est assez vile."*
And as a proof of exquisite bad taste,
Like statues of him everywhere are placed.

FRIEND.

Nor yet in undue size alone, but number
Of spurious Art-monstrosities we cumber
Street, minster, square, with stone or brazen lumber.
In Greece or Rome, a man who served his age
Nobly, or left his name on history's page,
As patriot, wise or daring, was supposed,
When death his grand career had duly closed,

Worthy, perhaps, one statue; and the same
By peers and people willed in full acclaim,
Stamped honour's wreath immortal round his name.
With vulgar prodigality of brass
(Which costs us nothing here), our cockneys pass,
Cabbing from Hyde Park Corner to the Tower,
Their Iron Duke six times within the hour.
Lo! where the giant, cock-horse on the arch,
Relentless gives the word perpetual "March!—"
Whereby is typified, in symbol witty,
The army riding rough-shod o'er the city.

CRITIC.

We read in history, that from Cortez' force
Strayed once, on march, a miserable horse.
The natives, in whose country he, chance-driven,
Wandered, believed the brute a god from heaven,
Or some beneficent demon, at the least;
Not having known before that kind of beast.
They lodged him nobly; worshipped him some hours;
And begged him to partake of fowls and flowers.
But though these offerings doubtless pleased his eye,
They plagued his heart; and so, reduced to lie,
Though leagues of grass waved round him eight feet high,
Their deity had nothing but to die.

They, thinking that he did this to condemn
Some sins or vices he had spied in them,
Not to be cozened out of all their pains,
Propped up his bones, and worshipped his remains.
So we, adopting just as sane a course,
By thus immortalising Wellesley's horse,
Honour the incarnation of brute force.

AUTHOR.

To which the hero's life is mostly lent;
His fixed idea of good government.
Though kings exhaust their honours on his breast,
And mourning myriads mob him to his rest,
For whom, when living, he but scorn expressed;
Though printing presses praise with tons of trash,
And law-lords eulogise till all be blash,
The hero knows alike both crowds and kings,
Weak-purposed, treacherous, variable things;
And that to seal the welfare of the few
Is all that wisdom,—all that force can do.

FRIEND.

Mankind are ruled to their profound content,
By three things mainly; force, fraud, accident.

CRITIC.

Add habit; 'tis a vast predicament.

AUTHOR.

Add law, creed, interest, and their own consent.

FRIEND.

Under the head of accident I class
Whate'er of good or wise may come to pass.
Upon the rest I need not now dilate,
For reasons, justly to be termed, of State.
Applaud, assist, whichever you may please;
You govern only under one of these.

AUTHOR.

All government is based on force, attractive
Moral, and centralising; or, on active,
Repressive, and material; these we know
The dual powers which balance all below.
The first demands no evidence; the second
On coarse and showy forms has always reckoned
To impose upon and please the vulgar mind,
Or awe the mass with proof of powers combined.
Though not of yore, where'er a monarch went
Was heard the cannon's blatant compliment;
The silent pomp of his mere presence told,
Far more than bellowing brass, or smoke outrolled,

Of powers devolved from Heaven that kings could hold.
We have interrupted you, I'm half afraid.

FRIEND.

Then came the grandest drama ever played:
As foul or monstrous masses, crystallized,
Take wholesome nature and a shape well prized,
A state was from a revolution made
Betwixt cock-crow and cock-crow; in which case
The veriest unities of time and place
Were delicately kept, with Greek, with Gallic grace.
I read De Morny's manifesto when
I am wearied with the ways of common men.
We like the Emperor, and are not afraid
To own him "a skilled workman" in his trade;
But don't feel called on, for all that, to thank
That patriotic and ingenious Frank,
Now taking soundings for an under-channel
Railroad, because to cross it makes a man ill;
That Continental troops may ride at ease,
From France to England, underneath the seas.
Passing from arts and empire, came the war,
Which brings us down to where we nearly are.
The object of that war appears to me
Wrapped in this query:—Russia! shall it be

In Europe? or, shall Europe be in Russia?
So France and England rose in arms to crush a
Gigantic foe which threatened their existence;
Quelled by God's grace, and mutual assistance.

CRITIC.

The object granted,—were we justified
In waging war for rights so misapplied
As those, by infidels upon whose side
We fought?

FRIEND.

Were war e'er righteous that's the one;
The mischief is, it left off work half done.

CRITIC.

A man, then's, not *ex vi* a hypocrite?

FRIEND.

But when he boasts himself his opposite.
What's war but wholesale murder legalized?
All law first quashed, whereby 'tis authorized.
For war, with Christianity combined,
A mere chimæra forms, of ill-trained mind.
They nullify each other for the nonce,
And cannot both be entertained at once.
One or the other triumphs, and which ever
Does so, that moment you the two dissever.

That each may necessary be, I grant,
But nothing can combine the two but cant.
As long as we are cutting others' throats,
The act an act of heathenry denotes,
And puts the self-called Christian out of court,
Whatever else his claims to that resort.

AUTHOR.

Question! Does Christianity dispense
With rights and duties bound to self-defence?

FRIEND.

If I'm assaulted by another man,
I am justified in slaying, if I can,
The would-be murderer. Who assails my life,
Earns, if he gets, his death-stroke in the strife.
For life and liberty a man may fight,
For kithe and kindred sacred in his sight,
And honour dearer than the golden light.
But if I run a man right through and through,
As in some cases I've a right to do,
I'll boast no Christian motive in the act,
Nor Gospels garble to excuse the fact;
Enough that he's a rogue, and I'm attacked.
Ask me how much about his soul I care
Just at that moment, and—no! I'll not swear.

CRITIC.

Then self-defence and wars defensive may,
In certain cases, be allowed, we'll say.

FRIEND.

Truly. What I profess I cannot bear,
Is mixing up religion in the affair.
Wracking with blood and fire earth's every region,
Yet innocent as some lactating pigeon,
Boasting ourselves and peace-making religion.
But name the wars defensive England e'er
With Kaffirs, Sikhs, Affghans, or anywhere
In Russia, Persia, China, India's waged.
Does wounded interest, or self-love enraged,
Give yet a hope of thirst for war assuaged?
Or are we still—such hypocrites men are—
Preaching up peace, and practising but war?
What was our strife with France engaged in for?
By crushing Boney did we better Europe?
Or help to bind old bondsmen with a new rope?

AUTHOR.

Defensive war, at least, is justified.

CRITIC.

But all war is defensive on one side.

FRIEND.

It matters less who first begins a quarrel,
Than who for right and good contends, who for ill.

CRITIC.

Precisely. Now, the only thing required
To rule the world in reason, as desired,
Is a perpetual oracle inspired
To settle every question that subvenes,
And say what right, truth, good, or aught else, means.

AUTHOR.

You have it in the Scriptures.

FRIEND.

True; but there
We lack again the inspired interpreter.

AUTHOR.

The Church?

FRIEND.

The Church! We're Protestants, good sir;
And hold the Church, as you or I, may err.

AUTHOR.

You have no ultimate guide, then?

FRIEND.

I admit
That none but One is possible or fit;

And that One not confined to Church or see,
But wheresoe'er His Temples are, there He.
And during all this time your brainless Press,
Not all I own, but always more or less,
Swept clean of common sense, as by "distress,"
Must, week by week, prognosticate the fall
Of Europe's foremost name imperial.
Still, week by week, the long laborious lie,
Noxious, yet rich in foul fecundity,
Like some old stump where toadstools seed and rot,
Springs fresh from its own spawn, and die will not.
But modern prophets play a tedious game;
For, unlike Beor's son, howe'er they came,
'Tis cursing they depart, and feel no shame
That, hap what may, they're always wrong the same.
Thus, once a band of Balaams from the North,
Professors, skalds, historians, all set forth;
Scattering dismay throughout the land, they went
Southwards, to beard the Free Trade Parliament;
But every now and then, to hoard the race,
Like engines "blowing-off" their steam apace,
They paused, and puffed each other in the face.
Arriving just in time to be too late,
They preached to crowded pits, on England's fate,
And proved before us all to demonstration,
The final sunset of the British nation.

But poor Britannia takes, with patience fraught,
More ruining than many people thought;
So while her fate not much our fears increased,
We groaned, and wiped our spectacles—at least.
They might have saved their breath to cool their porritch;
Mankind so laughed crape fell ⅛ at Norwich.
Then came the Peace, and age of infant preachers,
When old men played old boys, and boys played teachers.

AUTHOR.

Knowledge, not wisdom, corrugates the brow,
The nursling may be wiser than you now.

FRIEND.

Then Churchmen and Dissenters hailed the advantage
On either side, of so much power of rantage;
And they were thought for cure of souls the best,
Who measured most of inches o'er the chest.
All which discussion in the daily papers
As wholesome proved as that on unlit tapers.

CRITIC.

Is't because Boanerges roar and thunder
They draw such flocks? For much it moves my wonder
That crowds, with joy so marked, it might be shamm'd,
Should rush to hear themselves so loudly damned;

And all, in tones that might volcanos quell,
Obstreperously ordered off to—well,
The word's tabooed, it ends, I think, in "l."
But wedged in tight twixt muslin and brocade,
A sobbing matron and a shuddering maid ;
With tears one reddens her Junonian eyes,
One bursts her new French bodice with her sighs,
Ah me ! what sins their memories must comprise !
Sweet sympathy there drives a roaring trade
And makes, or finds, some martyrs, I'm afraid.

AUTHOR.

Bank-rogues, to wit, who open shop with prayer ;
As if, while you were ogling my Lord Mayor,
Whom Providence hath anchored in that chair,
Some tiny rascal should your pocket rifle
Of watch, purse, handkerchief, or other trifle,
Saying, " For what we are going to receive
May the Lord make us thankful ! " you may grieve ;
But watch and he together take French leave.

FRIEND.

On serious subjects I confess I touch
With some reluctance and with reverence much.
Religious liberty makes (such as ours)
Church and Dissent alike respected powers ;

This one established by the general will,
By special that, for freedom's sacred still;
Both seem to flourish best when side by side
They fight one foe, or emulous breast the tide
Of unbelief, vice, profligacy, pride.
But though Dissent is sooner put in motion,
The Church hath more of rational devotion,
And that majestic order which we feel,
Faith her first law, knowledge her last reveal.
A polype cut as oft as you can count,
Hath of vitality no more amount
Than when entire; and thus too of Dissent;
Which some bring forward as an argument
Of separate action, favouring vitality,
Good Mother Church as much hath in reality.

CRITIC.

No argument of mine I beg you'll seize on.

AUTHOR.

To argue does not always mean to reason.

FRIEND.

A Protestant and Catholic once engaged
In controversy; fierce the battle raged.
All Christendom in dumb suspense agreed
The event should fix the universal creed.

The weapons of their warfare strew the ground,
And gross abuse and verbal dirt abound ;
Wig, mitre, cassock, surplice, alb, and stole,
Goods that refresh or sanctify the soul,
Decrees of councils, fulminating bulls,
The champions hurl at one another's skulls ;
And mutual thrust with such death-dealing quills
That each, in hope, his foeman's life-ink spills.
For many a moon the combatants were lost
In clouds of learned dust on all sides tossed,
Till two triumphant shouts each other crossed.
When the belligerents at length grew visible,
'Twas found (restrain I beg your muscles risible),
That hero who as Protestant began,
Had made himself a Papist ; and the man
Who challenged first the contest, as a priest,
Holding himself infallible at least,
Now damns the Pope, and calls him "ten-horned beast."
Such and so great is argument, so good.
Disputed points stand always where they stood,
And will do, doubtless, till another flood.
To come down to the day which is our own,
The world seems most unreasonable grown ;
And few, if any, on one point agree,
Save who shall play the part of Pharisee
With most luxurious inconsistency.

CRITIC.

To all the world (it struck me) and his wife
Brass bands and flower-shows form the bliss of life.

FRIEND.

For this we rob our brethren of the wealth
Left sacred to their faith and their souls' health
By pious generations, ages passed,
To many millions 'mounting at the last;
And then, with Messieurs N—wd—gte and Sp—n—r,
Burn with remorse we had not eased them sooner;
And though so gorged to stir we're hardly able,
Grudge them the crumb Maynoothian 'neath the table.
The virtues of all premiers massed in one,
From Pitt to Peel, from Peel to Palmerston,
Can scarce restrain that bigotted rapacity,
Which pelf prefers to national veracity.
Though this, I grant, be false conservatism,
There's also seen a spurious liberalism.
To open a gate, and to pull down a wall
Are not the same thing, I maintain, at all;
The world itself is based upon conditions;
We can't achieve at random all volitions;
Each one imposes all the general force
Permits him to accomplish; his main course
The prudent man selects, and such fulfils,
Maugre all jealous or contrarious wills.

Thus from opposing forces small and great
Results the general interest of the State.
But no one can aver that black and white,
However blended, can in truth unite,
Or be conceived as one by mental sight.
If I deride the Lamas 'tis not fit
That I should in their chief assembly sit,
Nor seek to govern in the State through it;
So, if the creed I trust in, they contemn,
'Twere vain to hope for unity with them.
Does Nathan burn to be elected Pope?
He'll first become a Christian, let us hope.
Does Pio languish to be hailed Chief Priest?
He must submit to (what is it?) at least.
Would you be Begler-Beg in grand divan?
Then you'll profess yourself a Mussulman.
So, if a Jew, in any Christian land,
To represent the people forth should stand,
How can he justly represent their mind,
On all the thousand questions that we find,
Or more or less, with Christian faith combined?
The spread of Christian truth to him's a figment,
Whereby is nought but larger sales of pig meant.
Your faith's a myth, your Christ a mean impostor,
Under whose name one huge deceit you foster,
You'll some day find "as sure as God's in Gloucester."

The man is simply daft who would enjoy
All power or privilege without some alloy.
"The Queen, herself, can do wrong"; who said it,
Said justly; but her ministers take credit
For doing, or advising, all that's right;
So even in the constitution's sight,
And in her own prerogative's despite,
Her's is a negative enjoyment quite.

AUTHOR.

The answer to these arguments is one
That can't be well refuted. The thing's done.
Your proofs are irresistible, I own.

FRIEND.

We don't think men in power have lives so free
From cark and care as some squireens, may be;
We know the country oft is most ungrateful
To those who year by year an aching pate full
Have of her business, to the detriment
Of their own need; but these things leave content
To those whose forte or fate is such to manage,
And statesmen, who arise but once in an age.
While lasts the dust and struggle of the race
The world can scarcely mark men's proper place.

Reviled, reproached, on all sides poked and hit,
Denied all wisdom, but impeached of wit,
That frightful sin, all dullards hating it;
The patriot victim of some popular bray,
When all will speak and none have aught to say,
Apart from rumour's contradictory lies;—
Or veteran statesman in his stern emprise,
Posterity alone with calm, clear eyes
Can fitly judge; from brazen bellowing lungs,
The witling's war, the tournament of tongues;
The senate's prosy purge, whose drastic wit,
However full the House, soon empties it;
From foes and parasites of power, who fight
Not because each is wrong, but both are right;
He turns to her who knows his secret aim;
She, smiling, to the sister hands of Fame,
Confides the sealed credentials of his name.

CRITIC.

I, on the whole, have come to one conclusion,
That government's a noble institution;
And we and all mankind with awe should cover us,
Towards those who take the trouble to rule over us;
But that of marvellous men on earth's round ball,
The Chancellor of the Exchequer caps them all;

And second but to that paragon of our nation
Who first invented indirect taxation;
(A grander principle than gravitation),
Whereby the more we fleece ourselves, in verity,
The more we add to general prosperity.

AUTHOR.

Which had the Stuart known, he to this day
Had kept his head, nor Scotland had to say
She sold her sovereign for arrears of pay;
Nor Puritanic hypocrites had borne
The weight of Cromwell's arm, who rose forsworn
'Gainst Charles's finger; nor the foul disgrace
Of desecrating Britain's royal race.

CRITIC.

To make amends for that we are bound to strive;
And aren't we now, as any folk alive,
Loyal to her, the Queen Bee of our hive,
Mother of queens, that shall be, if things thrive;
Whose life seems one long popular event,
Crowned with perpetual and supreme content?

FRIEND.

Ah! times are altered. Right and just and all moral
Are things at Windsor now, we know, and Balmoral;

So unlike Carlton Houses and Pavilions,
Where "play" lost thousands, and work wasted millions.
Vowed to contempt, the habits of a court
No more, of lofty moralists the sport,
United thus with human nature's best,
Have drawn the sting from many a waspish jest
And gibe, now perished utterly, as though
You breathed upon a falling flake of snow.
But time wears on. I had not thought to say
One word upon the topics of the day.

AUTHOR.

'Tis easier far on themes and things political
To say one's mind, than aught we wise or witty call.

CRITIC.

A man's opinions, partially concealed,
Have some advantage over those revealed.

FRIEND.

In youth we form opinions; as we age
We cease that process, and, become more sage,
In rectifying those of youth engage.

CRITIC.

But now I think of it,—

AUTHOR.

Why yes; I've brought
A trifling MS. which I hoped,—I thought—

CRITIC.

Thank ye. I've seen so many in my day;—
In fact, I read but little any way,
And manuscript, I must say, least of all,
Young authors mostly write such wretched scrawl,
They might have been (so deems a mere outsider)
Taught penmanship by some demented spider,
Whose education had been so neglected,
That what his pupils proved might be expected.

AUTHOR.

I thought you read what you reviewed?

CRITIC.

Sometimes,
When our opinion with the Author's chimes.

FRIEND.

Good. A mind open to conviction means
One free to tend which side self-interest leans.

CRITIC.

But ah; just Heaven! what have I done at last?
Evaded dog-tax? or, when came the Fast,

Was it, that on the seventh of last October
I was (perhaps) too abstinent—too sober ?
The noble order of Pythagoreans,
Who ate of neither hearts, nor brains, nor bëans
(Note the diæresis), nor drank of wine
Until the sun, sea-setting, gave the sign
To the Initiate, were not more punctilious
Than I, though constitutionally bilious,
And not improved by losing a day's dinner,
Which, though it makes one sallower grow and thinner,
Leaves me as much as ever of a sinner;
Whatever my offence, like Cain, I swear
My punishment is more than I can bear.

AUTHOR.

Why, what on earth's the matter ?

FRIEND.

What's amiss ?

CRITIC.

Look on this bard—the miscreant ! And on this !

FRIEND.

What, this ? Woe's me ! a roll of rhymes, I find.

CRITIC.

Oh, rhyme ! thou fatal gift to humankind ;

Bane of our tongue, beguiler of our youth,
Far urging from the strict and sober truth;
Far from the steep where science cheering stands.

AUTHOR.

Oh, help me, Phœbus! In what gentle hands
I've placed my verses, and my muse's credit.
Give back the volume!

CRITIC.

What? Before I've read it?

FRIEND.

Of fugitive verse I cannot say I'm fond.

CRITIC.

Of fugitive? No; nor yet of vagabond.
Behold another innocent designed
To swell some massacre of infant mind.
The crowd, the crush, of books is now so great,
Of inky rags earth groans beneath the weight,
And ofttimes sore remonstrates with her fate:
While mobs of mimic bards, before our eyes,
The "wilderness of monkeys" realise.

FRIEND.

Here with my learned brother I concur;
For books one scarcely can with comfort stir

From house to house. The nonsense they contain
Breeds, doubtless, polymania in the brain.

AUTHOR.

Why we may not as reasonably produce
New books, as Nature new things for our use,
When winter wanes, and slowly greening woods
Make dim the distant view through thickening buds,
I cannot see. For every time and place
Hath special want and aptitude and case,
Which leaves for just supply an ample space.

FRIEND.

Three hundred volumes, somewhat more or less,
Would hold the best of treasures we possess ;
Of course, we don't suppose oracular Argo,
Beside her heroes, took superfluous cargo ;
My view has been to private use confined,
Just noting founts of thought and crowns of mind ;
To know which braces both the feeblest powers,
And strains the strength of strongest minds (like ours) ;
Who books amasses, piles for future Goths
Their fires ; or caters but for worms and moths.

CRITIC.

Oh, for a "*coup d'état,*" to give one power
To pitch into "*The Row*" for "half an hour

With the (worst) authors;" I'd have every shot
Fired at new works particularly red-hot.
Nor only that; but decimate the rank
And file of that huge literary Bank
In Bloomsbury, y'clept the Brit. Museum.

AUTHOR.

This argument of *tuum* hurts not *meum*.
Allow me to submit to you the fact,
These leaves by printer's ink are all intact.

CRITIC.

True; but why write at all? There, there's your fault;
Once on their march, bards know not how to halt.
Long as they live, verse dribbles upon verse,
And each one mostly than the prior worse.

AUTHOR.

I have considered things beneath the sun
Like Solomon, and even some things done,
And know not where to seek more noble thought,
More spotless truth, or art more finely wrought,
Than in the works of bards of every time,
Of every creed and language, class and clime;
Of every science, song's the most sublime,
And tops the sphere of knowledge like the ball
Of brilliants on the crown imperial.

It treats of all that's great, or fair, or true ;
Its eldest beauties are all fresh as dew ;
Old Homer is like spring time ever new.
My brain, shall mathematics cramp and craze ?
Or metaphysics in their mill-horse maze ?
Where will you send me, pray, to search for truth,—
In logic's dry and varnished bones, forsooth ?
In ethics or Pantheons, while we see
Each land has its pet immorality,
Except our own, which generously embraces
Vice of all times, and virtue of all places ?
In following up affinities and laws
Of atomies imponderable, cause
And combination of all things material,
Igneous, aquatic, earthy, and aërial,
Till Nature through our fingers seems to slip,
We lose the more, the tighter that we grip,
And dread in our time it should come to pass
That all things end, as they began, in gas ?
In chronicling the clouds, or studying strata ?
Stones, bones, and such like geologic data ;
In pinning butterflies ? or picking shells ?
In carving cats ? or Canterbury bells ?—
All these are grand pursuits, entitled science,
Pursuits with which my soul disdains alliance.

FRIEND.

No doubt you take a very lofty view
Of what's invisible, and profound, if true;
Say, "Critic, of pure reason," what think you?

CRITIC.

That there is sunshine outside every fog
I question not; 'neath every quaking bog
Firm land is somewhere to be found, I grant,—
Nay, superimposed on beds of adamant;
But how to gain the tip-top, how the base,
Is just the difficulty in either case,
Meantime the hindrance we must quit, or face.
A man who writes a work on physiology,
Comparative anatomy, or conchology,
Writes it to show man's structure, and creation's,
In Reason's last, maturest observations.

FRIEND.

Truly. These things are with instruction rife.
My Doctor, now, for instance, tells me life
Depends on putrefaction; and digestion
Shows but another aspect of that question,
The fermentative and combustive process
We carry on within ourselves with no cess-
Ation, until the mill forgets to grind,
And stops for want, or some say change, of wind.

How very curious it must be to learn all
This soul-case holds of cogs and wheels internal.
These studies, therefore, are, I think, as any fit :
Two winters spent at Guy's a bard would benefit.

CRITIC.

There's something in those topics well worth knowing,
According to your own imperfect showing,
While yet the brain's elastic, ripening, growing.
But poetry, except with one or two,
Is penned because men have not much to do,—
Of course I don't mean that 's the case with you.

AUTHOR.

But if you did, and though it were, to me
It matters not; the leisured mind is free;
And freedom is to wisdom so affied,
You may regard them as bridegroom and bride.

FRIEND.

I beg your pardon; Wisdom's an old maid,
And of all freedom mortally afraid.

CRITIC.

A man conceits himself inspired; mistakes
Impressibility for power, and makes
A volume of his blunder for our sakes.

With gold pen, ruby-tipped, he sits, indites
A love-strain to his mistress (Queen of frights,
As he depicts her). Oh! her snowy hair
Flows o'er her ebon bosom, darkly fair!

AUTHOR.

Nay, you reverse all qualities, I swear.

CRITIC.

Do I? See, then, in verse a high adept,
A secret bards have to themselves e'er kept,
Who so distort, confound things, and transfuse,
All nature seems made mulish by the muse.

AUTHOR.

Poets have leave and licence, I admit,
To do aught in their wisdom they think fit.
The true and only autocrats of mind,
Nor e'er for posts responsible designed;
But seldom sin they 'gainst what's true and kind.

CRITIC.

I should much like, I must confess, to see
A parliament of poets who'd agree
To any set of laws which might be made
To fix and tranquillise the rhyming trade.
Query,—would more than this be e'er enacted,
"Provided always, and be it infracted."

FRIEND.

And still, of all the royal roads to Fame,
There seems none equal to the poet's name.

CRITIC.

Come, then; to business.

AUTHOR.

Let there be one word
In deprecation of harsh judgment heard.
Composed for neither favour, fame, nor pelf,
But to employ, improve, or please myself,
These rhymes, youth-written—I'm not yet of age—

FRIEND.

Ah! that "speaks volumes."

AUTHOR.

Ay, and many a page
In boyhood, even—I can scarce be charged
With having squandered time, which in enlarged
Pursuits and nobler studies should have passed.

CRITIC.

Excuse me, there, I beg; not quite so fast.
Young lads I fear will soon begin to print
Their very pot-hooks.

AUTHOR.

Thank you for the hint.

CRITIC.

Don't mention it. The fact is, when one sees
Such headings as "Lines,"—"Verses,"—"Stanzas,"—these,
The rudiments of feeling, sense, taste, thought,
Are just poetic pot-hooks; good for nought,
Save as they prove the urchin ne'er will hold
His quill, nor slant his down-strokes as he's told.
'Tis strange, but right inspires a kind of terror,—
There's nothing upon earth so old as error.
So many blunders men by nature make,
One might suppose the world one great mistake.

FRIEND.

Now was there nothing you had yet to learn
Before you took to teach us, ere your turn?

AUTHOR.

To tell the truth, I never thought of teaching.
Can't a man think what's proper without preaching?
Speak earnestly, unless he thump a pulpit?
Nor smoothly, without mouthing to a full pit?
If, till we all things know, we should defer
Doing what good we can, 'twould be to err
Vastly indeed, and lovelier 'tis to see
Life's beauties budding than the full-leaved tree.

FRIEND.

That answers to a gooseberry-bush, not me.

AUTHOR.

So youth the season is for poesie.

CRITIC.

How thoroughly you have studied vegetation!
Green things, and all that grow by germination.

AUTHOR.

Well, I admit it. Men are human trees,
Growing root heavenwards, and their faculties
And senses spiritual leaves and flowers;
With the divine addition that some powers—
Thought, speech, and locomotion may be ours.
These in life's spring most please the observer, when
Futurity itself is making.

FRIEND.

Then
The curdling process of becoming men.

AUTHOR.

Life's cup is gilded only near the rim,
Just where fresh-poured youth's empty brilliants swim.

CRITIC.

The metal down below looks deuced dim.

FRIEND.

So young folks tell us. I once knew a youth
Who, ere he had cut his second wisdom tooth,
Vowed that, to him, life no allurement gave,
And all he looked for was a good deep grave.
Whether, in this search, he was disappointed,
Or his pursuit and he became disjointed,
I cannot at this moment justly tell.
Time crawled on. He contrived to marry well,
And had six children before one could spell;
As thick as thieves they came. A fifteenth cousin
Died, and bequeathed him thousands just a dozen.
His elder brother suddenly expired
At Grand Cairo, whither he'd retired,
With virgin Almeh charmed and the chaste bee-dance;
To all his friends at home the luckiest riddance;
But most to my friend, who to his estate
Came, and, though now his rent-roll is not great,
He lives at what folks call a spanking rate.
He hunts, he shoots; he colours up his gills
With claret, and fresh air on chalky hills;
A churchman strict, his pew he roundly fills;
Sits on the bench, quite constant to the quorum,
And lectures poachers with sublime decorum.
For each of the professions training are sons,
As lawyers, doctors, soldiers, sailors, parsons.

When all are well established we shall find
They'll doubtless keep in order half mankind,
They, and their daddy; and you'll hear him say
He thinks the world grows better every day;
At all events, a good thing, in its way.

CRITIC.

The ancient poets, men of thought sublime,
Were wights of some experience in their time,
As statesmen, warriors, travellers, when such names
Bore a substantial sound, akin to Fame's.
To travel, thus, at one time, meant to go,
Mostly a-foot, through various lands, to know
The climates, customs, races, laws, tongues, creeds,
Of men, their histories and heroic deeds,
And so forth; but by steam, hotels, and rails,
Our travellers now tell very different tales.
Through many a mile of cutting, bank, and tunnel,
They simply pass like smoke blown through a funnel.

AUTHOR.

The truth is, what we need or care to know
Is booked, already, on such topics; so
In learning, too, the difference that obtains
Between times passed and present forms our gains.
What took maturest years in ages passed
Is learned by brats in ragged schools at last.

At ten years old a crossing sweeper's daughter,
Knows more than Anaxagoras could have taught her
Through a curriculum of seventy years,
In figures, facts, and physics, as appears
From glancing at our class-books; there the sages
Must all play school-fags to these later ages.

FRIEND.

More crammed with facts, I must confess we seem,
But as to truths, in that they're still supreme.
Truths philosophic, ethic, would you seek,
You'll find them snug within their native Greek.

CRITIC.

Ah! "as to truths," if only truths you speak,
Your mouth you'll open once (we know) a week.

AUTHOR.

Fondly presumptuous, I still wish to hear
Your judgment.

FRIEND.

Tempt him not. Thy fate I fear,
Oh! ah! oh!

CRITIC.

Pause! I'm dreadfully severe.

FRIEND.

I'll play the Chorus ; and, as modern Greeks
Write, when a murderous mother, maddening, speaks,
Run through our code of expletives sublime,
Oh ! Ah ! Ai ! Ai ! with neither tune nor rhyme ;
Whose choriambics choice unhinge our jaws,
Or set our teeth on edge, like filing saws.

CRITIC.

The Drako I, of critics ! In these veins,
Which revolutionary rouge distains,
The whole force lies of critical campaigns ;
So woe to you young bardlings scant of brains !

FRIEND.

Oh, woe ! Oh, Dis ! Oh, Cerberus ! shake your chains.

CRITIC.

In this ensanguined ink-bottle (don't stagger),
I plunge my steel-pen, that's to say, my dagger ;
The maddening moment comes, or soon or late,
And on my sanctum's walls I write their fate
Who dare provoke the war-cry, all may see,
"EXINANITE," blazoned fair and free,
As challenge to all minstrel-knights that be
So crazed as to contest these lists with me ;
And much it soothes me, glowering round the room,
On many a rhymester's dark and bloody doom.

FRIEND.

Ai! Ai!

AUTHOR.

The Ogre! Cacus, Sawney Bean,
Red handed in their dens, less fierce I ween.
Though hardly made hilarious by the view
Of justice, as administered by you,
Yet, after all, when your decree is passed,
These rhymes, my first, may likely be my last.

CRITIC.

I hope they may be. I'm a candid man.

FRIEND.

That's saying the severest thing you can.

CRITIC.

Suppose we try a sortilegium, eh?

AUTHOR.

As likely to be fair as any way.

CRITIC.

Songs, satires, odes, I see; but, help me Jove!
I scarcely see a syllable of love.

AUTHOR.

'Tis stale; for all have loved; and who regards
What every sumph can boast? Too much like cards,

Love levels down all intellects at once,
The saturnalia of the fop and dunce.

FRIEND.

Whist is a test of foresight; neither shall you
Beggar-my-neighbour, grand game! undervalue;
The same on larger scale the world still plays,
And loses at, and wins at, all its days.

CRITIC.

But love! (blaspheme not) spurns all mean control,
The most ætherial passion of the soul,
The highest of the billows ever stealing
Across the restless depths of human feeling,
And if, at youth's full tide, on hostile shore,
It dash the gallant heart, the heart's glad course is o'er.
And so your sight—for bards profess to watch
The tides of their own souls, could never catch
Love's bounding billow and its blinding spray,
Dazzling and dancing on its homeward way?

AUTHOR.

What if I say, No?

CRITIC.

Go, then, recreant elf!
A man, a poet, self absorbed in self;

A monster! You write! Pray, sir, can you fly?
For love's the alphabet of poesy;
A heavenly instinct most to life allied,
The source and end of nature sanctified.
The wretch who ne'er hath studied in Love's school,
Stands but one grade above the babe or fool;
One fit of love instructs us more in life,
Than fifty years of selfishness or strife;
To all more manly energy imparts,
Expands, exalts, and purifies our hearts.
All that we learn of good we learn in youth,
When passion's heat is pure, when love is truth;
When—

FRIEND.

I beg pardon; did you name the day?

AUTHOR.

It quite escaped his memory, I dare say.
Pray, tell us, then, what quarter of the moon
Such things occur in. 'Twere a general boon.

FRIEND.

But just because he's wanted, he can't do it.

CRITIC.

I've stated my opinion. I stick to it.
Who lives in love doth live in part with Heaven;
'Twixt here and there, the golden link that's given,

To mortal eye, of that stupendous chain
Which doth the living universe maintain.

AUTHOR.

Whatever use a lover is in art,
And we are all tender of a tender part,
I hold it for a fact that's undeniable,
Lovers to ridicule are sadly liable.
Consider just the "work done" of a lover;
Sighing for what, alack! one can't discover;
In doleful verse attempting to portray
The hopes, fears, pains which rack him night and day;
Whining and moody, lonely, absent, sad,
Distracted, sudden, purposeless, or mad;
Truly a more than second-sight is given
To one who sees in such the counterpart of Heaven.

FRIEND.

Come, don't be too severe. Rest you content,
If this I grant, to strut your argument;
A man towards fifty, cured of kittenish gambols,
Thinks of hot dinners more than moonlight rambles.

CRITIC.

But stay, too soon I yielded to my spleen;
Among some very dry goods intervene
A batch of love-lays, and a tender "scene."
There seems not much connexion these between

AUTHOR.

Songs deal with feelings, mainly. Oft, events
The reader's judgment hints or supplements.
The intimate connexion 'tween our land
And neighbour Europe, by electric band,
Shows not upon the surface, understand.

CRITIC.

I understand. Such nonsense, as it means,
May serve for ultras, or for sub-marines;
Your regular "salts" are not such vivid greens.
These lyrics, if I take you, form a riddle,
Minus the wires that go across the middle?

AUTHOR.

Therefore, not wire-drawn.

CRITIC.

Oh, you are deadly funny,
And might "go," but you've neither "mare" nor "money."

AUTHOR.

Suppose I read a few lines?

FRIEND.

Well, proceed.

CRITIC.

Stop; spare us that infliction. Let me read.

A bard's "intoning" is so truly odd;
Of all the heroes of the land of Nod,
Commend me most to Jubal, drowsy sire
Of mad musician's harp and poet's lyre.

FRIEND.

When song I read I choose to loll at ease,
And blow my rainbow bubbles as I please,
From creamy vellum, printed fair and large, in
Such memorable vacancy of margin,
As brings some compensation to the mind
For inability aught else to find.

CRITIC.

Whene'er I open a poetic scroll
A serio-comic wonder fills my soul;
I've such sensations, doubtless, as a swimmer
Feels, when for ocean's under-billowy glimmer
He changes daylight, tumbling head first down,
And thinking the first moment dive and drown
Much like, till he recovers from his blunder,
Yet wonders all the while he still can wonder
Whether he be above the earth or under.
The whole from public nature strikes so far;
The tone of thought rings with such crazy jar;
The scene, too, so unlike this chequered sphere
We plumeless bipeds pad about on here.

AUTHOR.

Your charge against us proves that we succeed,
Or partially, at least, in what you read.
To metaphysics infinites belong;
Grand and indefinite the sphere of song.
And if within this twilight world of verse,
Your head you duck, you are still, I hope, no worse?

CRITIC.

Well, but these songs are such weak, childish things,
They seem to suit the age of bats and slings,
Tops, marbles; or a little later, may be;
But la! one's sick to see a whiskered baby.

AUTHOR.

I never met a man who proved to be
A flawless mass of pure consistency.

FRIEND.

You never did? I met one once, and he
Born deaf and dumb, was much too blind to see.

AUTHOR.

But odd opinions crop out here and there,
Which show incongruous with the greater share.
But—case in point—the world runs so contrarious,
Men's views and whims are oft so widely various,

One knows not what to judge; I thought you were,
From what you said, a gross idolater
Of Love.

FRIEND.

Whose love is of the truest sort
Says nothing, or says something plaguy short.
What we object to is the undue prominence,
In modern song, and almost total dominance
Of "woman's love," which but an episode is
In men's lives, who are not the sex's toadies.

CRITIC.

Here Burns and Byron led the way, and this is
Why poets deify their little misses,
Who doubtless are to them the incarnation
Of comprehensive and profound temptation.
Deep read in writers of our modern verse,
Living and dead, whose names I'll not rehearse,
Follow your leader each one cries till hoarse,
Without reflecting whither tends their course.

FRIEND.

Continual carping only tends to tedium;
Extremes themselves are right viewed from a medium.
A bard, of love, till twenty five may sing,
But let him then choose out another string.

CRITIC.

Some of the choicest love-tales ever told
Were born of brains mature and hearts full old.

FRIEND.

He, when mature, reviews the whole of life,
Its powers and aims, with cares, with duties rife;
Its joys, its griefs, its inward wearing strife;
Its aspirations, obligations, needs;
And weighs, severe, man's dues against his deeds;
Unmasks the interior tyrants of the heart,
And purges passion of its grosser part;
But if, in ripened years, he still continue
With all love's luscious clatter still to din you,
It were enough to set—the thing's past bearing—
His Grace, the Primate of all England, swearing.
Had I my will, indeed, of grief I'd rid you all;
For I'm a most prosaic individual;
I'd give you the congenial occupation
Of scaring crows, and "tenting" vegetation.

AUTHOR.

Poor Nature's inconsistent. Here she sows
Life seeds for all; friends vegetive, and foes;
Poison for these; there, remedies for those;
Elaborates here some microscopic life;
There slays whole hosts in internecine strife.

FRIEND.

Fighting, like smoking, is a world-wide habit ;
If you a warren watch you'll spy a rabbit ;
And, anytime you glance across the world,
You'll somewhere see two bloody flags unfurled.
Dame Nature, doubtless, deems it for their good
Her folks should now and then be all let blood ;
And so while leech and patient grin or jar,
Phlebotomizes all by one stroke—war.

AUTHOR.

Whatever Nature orders still is just,
Do it, enjoy it, suffer it, we must.
Now bards of Nature treat, but treat with art ;
Impowered to raise at times the inferior part,
They only can unlock man's wondrous heart ;
Though intricate the wards, their master key
Moves smoothly through divine machinery.

CRITIC.

We better know what bards assume to do.

AUTHOR.

Whatever they assume's in some sense true.

CRITIC.

To suffer in mind, body, or estate,
Or all the three at once, is no rare fate,
But these, to bards, are woes of trifling weight,

Who fainting as a fine art know, and can turn
Into their own breasts their own bull's-eye lantern.
As life-school models, philosophic misses,
Superior to their sex's prejudices,
Nude as a needle, attitudinise;
So these for our behoof will agonise;
Yea, like a zoophyte, turn inside out
Their very hearts, to illustrate a doubt.
Who studies aught with persevering skill,
His choice effects can reproduce at will.
A practised necromancer, such as you,
Can raise a ghost whene'er it suits to do.
So all these love-affairs one just regards
As so much stock in trade of bankrupt bards,
Whose books are never open to inspection
Till roguery is certain of detection.

AUTHOR.

I never loved, nor was loved; that is truth;
But who to woman has not sworn forsooth?

FRIEND.

Well, that's a question questionably fit;
The Court reserves the point; considers it.

AUTHOR.

You smile. 'Tis true; all feeling may be feigned,
As well forestalled or mimicked as restrained;

Consider well yourself: the unwary heart
With will and wile plays but a third-rate part.

CRITIC.

To libel human nature is not fit,
You show methinks more insolence than wit.
Though truth were held a libel, (wisely, too,
As dolts may deem) all libels are not true.

FRIEND.

Dissimulation, one may safely say,
Of all arts, dates from the most distant day.
The first thing Adam did, by way of task,
When he left Eden was to make a mask.
Of worldly goods he set but scanty store
True, he'd a little baggage, Eve no more;
But in her centred every contrariety;
His friend, his foe, his wife, and his society;
She was his subject, rebel, liege and equal,
And played so various parts that in the sequel
She showed as one too many for one man,
Till Adam pitched upon the aforesaid plan,
A fact which does him honour if aught can;
Whereby he grew, though each an early riser,
Almost a match for her, and her adviser.

CRITIC.

But if, as some have said, at sundry times,
Men all are actors, hypocrites and mimes,
None prove it more than poets in their rhymes.
Gods! how they rage, rejoice, despair and laugh!
The cups of woe and wrath by turns they quaff;
By turns they whimper, simper, madden, smile,
Now vow revenge, now pardon; all the while
Safe in their snuggery and their easy chair,
The bland cigar perfumes the morning air;
At eve they sip their claret or their port,
Or at an opera lounge their hour; in short,
Unharmed they live and harmless, as a star
From strife and storm unspeakably far, far!
These are the men, we are told, of judgment sound,
Who never see less than life's perfect round.

AUTHOR.

It's plain to see that you have been led astray
By writers of a false and foolish day,
When everything was so affected, strained,
In fact factitious, that no truth remained,
Nor manliness in practice; that we hope
All buried with the day and school of Pope.
A poet in these days is not a man
Self-severed from his kind as far as can

Be, lest his fine-toned sympathies should suffer
By contact with the sturdier mass and rougher.
As Cowper sensitive, as Johnson sage,
He sums the moral judgment of his age.
Exemption from the turmoil of the times,
(If fortune grant him or the luck of rhymes,)
His feeling rarifies, his soul sublimes;
But with all honest labourers him we find
Conspiring for the weal of human kind,
Unstarred, uncrossed, uneagled peers of mind.

CRITIC.

Still, Wordsworth and Béranger both have shown
That bards, like bears, are better let alone.

FRIEND.

The world wags now at such a precious pace,
It's nothing but Newmarket. Life's a race,
No journey now; no pilgrimage; no ease;
It's handicaps and heats and T. Y. C's.,
From day to day; and how keep up with these
Can poor folk, such as poets in their attics,
Confounds, I do confess, my mathematics.

CRITIC.

Quitting all this—it is a high offence
To level poetry with common sense.

'Tis hers to exaggerate and mystify;
To clothe in light each dark propensity,
And screen unsightly features of the mind
Like ivy over blocked up windows twined.

AUTHOR.

Not so. 'Tis false. Her end is to direct
The judgment, and inform the intellect;
To lift them up, to brighten, to refine;
The soul to soothe, and teach it to resign
Its careful joys, bequeathing earth to earth,
And seek with her for what alone is worth,
The spirit's splendid calm which hath in Heaven its birth.

CRITIC.

But poesie with care and woe is rife,
The stirrer, lover, chronicler of strife;
Her eye is stern and fiery, hot her breath;
She, from the first, hath raved of rapine and of death;
From Homer down to Scott—

FRIEND.

Don't go so far
Down, as where A. and Z., and others are,
Or you'll not up again.

CRITIC.

She lives on war,
And yokes the fellest passions to her car;

Cheers, lashes, goads them on their tempest course;
And from their champing, reek and foam, comes verse.
And are not natural passions badly strong?
Need they be swollen by fierce or wanton song?

AUTHOR.

All good is liable to be abused;
But poesie in passion stands excused.
Be this distinctly, wholly understood,
Men must be agitated for their good;
Grapes must be trodden first, and grain be ground,
Ere wine be looked for, or ere bread be found.
Though some opinions we are apt to shy at,
Opinion hurts not truth, though it run riot;
It's error always begs and prays for quiet.
And aught that men do glorious or right,
They do with heart, with ardour, and with might.
'Tis not the dull, dry, calculated facts
Which stiff geometry from squares exacts,
That marks the progress of the human mind,
Or renders man more noble, more refined;
The demi-gods of these things nothing knew;
Nor sage, nor hero recked if false or true.
Are our souls whiter, now, for gravitation?
Do asymptotes assist the soul's salvation?
Are cube roots paradisal vegetation?

How may it morally advantage us,
Surd, sine, co-sine, and tangent to discuss,
Or sum the differential calculus?
But what we learn from him the French call Shakspère,
Milton, or any other learned tax-payer
Of ancient times or modern, once impressed,
Rules the broad empire of man's holy breast.
Look back through all the ages earth hath known,
And half the glory, poets, is your own;
High o'er all kings and heroes take your throne.
The love of gold, power, honour, native land,
Exerts, at times, o'er men severe command.
Persuasion, for a brief but splendid day,
Over the restless crowd may boast her sway,
But Poesie can rule the world for aye;
For ever rule, dictatress of the mind,
The manners, and the morals of mankind!

CRITIC.

True rhetoric rather, nobly used, becomes
Man's grandest art, his mental glories sums.
Where is the composition you can count,
Like worthy with the Sermon on the Mount?
But waiving this, and narrowing down our sight;
The just conviction of some popular right,
Refused by meanness in the shape of might;

The stern avowal of some general claim,
Which makes the speaker's tongue a tongue of flame;
The words of wisdom which the will defies,
Converting crowds, who, learned in life's lies,
And losing for a moment, by surprise,
Conceit of knowledge, grow by instinct wise;
The eloquent eye, the white and winning hand,
Where is the brute that listeth to withstand?

AUTHOR.

But bards a dearer interest command.
We take them to our bosom at all times;
They serve us in all junctures; in all climes
They please the same; in their oracular rhymes
We fate consult; they always speak when needed;
They can't become less true, nor superseded,
Like books of facts which each successive year,
New science makes contemptible appear;
Grow, on the contrary, as we grow, they,
And seem more grand and lovely every day;
More true the more of human life we know,
The best and safest of all guides below;
Because, confined to universal charity,
They must please God:—'tis their peculiarity.

CRITIC.

Unless a poet gives us something new,
Improves the mass, or beautifies the true,
'Twere better far to fling his pen and ink,
One on the fire, the other down the sink.

FRIEND.

Poets are makers; men who make from mind,
From nature, from their hearts and ours combined;
From various knowledge and far-travelled view,
Draw what is great and beauteous, just and true.
A bard must have a pre-creative mind;
'Tis he hath power to loose the world, and bind.
An eye of all imaginative might;
An eagle's by the day, a lynx' by night;
His art he first must study, soon and late,
If he the world would pleasure, or create
Some work of large design, and aim mature;
Must will both to achieve, and to endure
In peace his own conception, which shall come
His soul to dominate, like the sacred dome
Which crowns our London or the orb of Rome.
Where'er a difficulty's to be met,
The pure stern soul will there its triumph get;
A mark as far as can be from the index
Of that success with which her votaries Sin decks.

Do thou, O bard! heed nothing but thy task;
Art shall her all bestow, and more than thou shalt ask,
Give Nature, if thou wisely cast thy fate
Among earth's great ones; at the least be great.
The worlds of Heaven prepared for thee appear;
Use all thy Maker makes, but use in fear;
Pray ere thou writ'st, and after writing, praise;
That God may bless and men may mind thy lays;
And in thy high and holy poet-calling,
God keep thy heart from failing, feet from falling.

CRITIC.

Yet poesy has not that wide effect
Upon the general mind one might expect.
For one who knows the minimum of verse,
Hundreds you find of music's worshippers.

FRIEND.

Simply because that asks an act of thought,
While this with sentiment at best is fraught.

CRITIC.

Still Triton counts his readers by the thousand,
Though rarely saith he aught the soul to rouse, and
Dilate; with pathos touch, or with wit please;
Nothing but monstrous mediocrities.

When animated, think on Fourier's notion
Of coasting round a butter-milky ocean,
Or sea of ginger-beer in mild commotion.

AUTHOR.

This to explain implies the vast defence,
And needless, of a general Providence,
In whose wise ordinations it is found,
To serve the most, the tasteless must abound;
Bread, rice, potatoes, suit us on that ground.
Our common life is not composed of thought
Supremely sacred, nor with rapture fraught;
Time amid trivial thoughts men mainly pass;
So, usual sense and feeling in the mass,
Like water, seek the level of their class.
But poetry is more than common sense,
Though with that basis it can scarce dispense;
And rather apt, like intellectual wine,
The heart to open and the wit refine.
Weak, ignorant writers are, who seem to think
Their every utterance worthy golden ink;
Hence heaps of ponderous tomes filled up, we find,
With common places of the common mind;
And hence a mass of trivial things, if true,
Penned with minuteness but to value due;
Like photographs of some old cap or shoe.

Pure, simple, and select those thoughts should be
Only, an author gives us leave to see;
For art on just and provident choice is based;
In indiscriminate nature is no taste.
And now that average authors are so numerous,
In every class, from lachrymose to humorous,
The greater need of that hydraulic pressure
By which true taste will all productions measure.
Merit is none in blackening so much paper;
The spirit wants condensing from the vapour.
Did writers of an endless comic serial
But deign to glance at sister arts material,
They there would samples find of power compress'd,
Which might some public benefit suggest,
Before the thirtieth moon; O, moon of rest!
For what the atmosphere to earth imparts,
That poesie appears to other arts,
Embracing, colouring, vivifying all,
Though less constrained than these, and less conventional.
So when in clay we fire and grandeur see,
And when in colours power and purity,
Of each the better part is poesie.

FRIEND.

The painter's gift hath rarely mightier been
Than to show Nature in some transient scene
External, passive; or the imagined mien

Of saint and hero; but the bard must deal
With truths, powers, passions, all men inly feel,
And, under pain of death, he must reveal;
Reveal, though few conceive the truths he knows,
And only doth to eyes unmasqued disclose.
Nor, like the sculptor, can the poet take
One wingèd moment, and immortal make
A life's conceptions, while his quickening hand
Moulds the clay all but human; nor command
From out the abyss of thought, completely planned,
Some soul-absorbing symbol, lofty, lone,
Christ on his cross, or Jove upon his throne.
His vaster work must vividly display
Faith, truth, and interest in the passing day;
Deeds past and future in his copious mind,
Classic, with cyclopædic lore combined,
Science, and knowledge of man's heart and mind.

CRITIC.

Much you aver is true. An active sage
The bard both is, and mirror of his age,
Or he'll not much our sympathies engage.
Mere ponderers by themselves must still be classed:
Poor W. went on maundering to the last,
Railing at railways; never knew the pleasure
Of just a mile a minute, statute measure.

I always ride express; the fastest rate
Safest I find; for, grant a tête-a-tête
With any obstacle (stray bull or heifer
Is swept off like a May-bug by a zephyr),
Perhaps (who knows?) you'll light on, in the latter
The immateriality of matter.

FRIEND.

There's a grand secret for us, quite in keeping
With those discoveries we are daily reaping
Out of the fields of science; though one trouble
Is, that there's little left for us but stubble.
We load the lazy lightnings with our messages,
But still the world is full of serious presages;
In spite of all cosmetics still distress ages;
In spite of eighteen ages, Christianity,—
Though now the moulds of race are broken up,
And nations poured into each other's cup,—
Hath failed to check war's bloody inhumanity;
By reason not of its own imperfection,
But clipped according to our predilection,
These learn to love, those love to learn a lie;
And preachers preach their own apostasy.
Still Christian states compete in manufacture,
With what shall cause man's frame the deadliest fracture.

Earth's monarchs, too, their most profound regard pay,
To shot, and shell, and bomb, and other hard pay;
Yea, foster most the inhuman arts that be
To homicide most servant:—not so he,
Who all the glories of two crowns was mute on,
But rather spoke of Leibnitz and of Newton.

AUTHOR.

Suppose friend Broadbrim made some grand discovery,
Whereby the world might grow one vast drab dovery;
Some universal solvent of disputes,
Wars, disagreements, strifes, and legal suits;
And to announce the same should think advisable,
Through any medium (not, of course, excisable);
How many auditors, or applicants,
Called Christian—Catholics, or Protestants,—
Would he have, guess? I bet a four-nine hat,
He polls no more than would go under that.
But if some Prince should cursorily say,
He's plans he meant to prove, and thought would pay;
Whereby he could, at telescopic distance,
Annihilate a peaceful town's existence;
To share his plans, and eager to unfold them,
Would flock such numbers, Hyde Park could not hold them.

FRIEND.

And having thus belied our faith, and made
With impious hypocrisy, a trade,
As never heathen did, of sheer hostility,
And slain men to the crown of our ability;
Our brethren in the flesh, whose souls we feign
To groan and yearn over with pious pain;
We send an honest dullard, hired to blurt
Some thundering text he knows but to pervert,
Or mock compassion for his hearers' hurt;
And so contrast our theory and practice,
That nothing baser than a Christian's act is,
Except his word, say Pagans; and the fact is.
In spite of being ground in Logic, now,
Two thousand years two hundred, you'll allow,
They are so afraid of their own reasoning, men
Will argue up to nine, but not to ten,—
There they begin the unfinished scale again;
Such dreadful treatment they from Truth expect,
They never land, for fear of being wrecked;
Because the sun a shadow casts, say they,
How preferable darkness seems to day!
A merciful completeness is to them,
The only view of God's scheme all condemn.
The only thought that causes in the mind
Of every separate thorn-backed sect we find,

One doubt as to the power which rules mankind,
On wisest, kindest, broadest laws combined,
Is this: that He who doth to all diffuse
A sense of truth, from whom all power, all good accrues,
Should just o'erlook their own peculiar views;
Nor hold it indispensable the world,
For their success, head over heels be hurled;
Whose views, to guide that world, so much too narrow,
Scarce qualify the fools to wheel a barrow.
Misled by inconsistencies like these,
To Negroes preach the priest-rid Portuguese,
Whom selling souls and buying bodies please.
So Missionaries moan o'er poor Chinese,
Our favourite and most intimate enemies;
To whom we prove our godly care for Sunday,
By "slackening shell" from Saturday to Monday,
Burning and slaughtering all the week but one day.
New York sends clergy to the far off Brahmin,
While neighbour Redskins, by war, rum, and famine,
From poisoned seed produced, in thousands die;
Too near to move the holy charity
Which acts with warmth inversely as the distance;
So kind we are when no one needs assistance;
But if he does, why, then, it's time—to talk;
If bad, he'll die; if well, he'll doubtless walk.

Others again, less burning to make known
What views they hate, than deify their own,
Boast Heaven's adoption of their own opinion,
And justify by force their joint dominion.
These may be right, or wrong, or blessed, or damned,
But only let the gates of Heaven be slammed
On such and such, their near or distant kinsmen,
And this belief who loudest bawls most wins men.
Be sure, ye doleful dupes who daily dream
That God will save the world by rags and steam;
That, thwarted, by the Devil, of His end,
And forced on your subscriptions to depend,
He leaves the unprotected world to call,
For ghostly succour on the Excestrian Hall;
That inspiration having wholly ceased,
The soul on tons of penny tracts may feast,
And drain, like Roman Gemini, from the latter—
Call Bigotry a she-wolf, and you flatter—
What critics style "much valuable matter;"
Who think in Choctaw types salvation's latent,
And Mercy rubs her hands o'er each new patent;
Ye flatterers of waste paper, which the Kaffirs
Shoot back to us in wadding, jolly laughers;
O rest ye sure, that in His careful hand,
Who from destruction saves a grain of sand,
Lie safe all orbs, all souls, He formed and planned;

Be sure the heathen hold their souls from God
And not from you. Heaven lies not in your nod
To treasurers, when suggesting the amount
Of your donation to the year's account.
Trade's selfish principle religion mocks;
You can't invest salvation in the stocks;
Long balance sheets and quarterly reports
Small joy create, I fear, in heavenly courts;
Nor would the world of grace divine lie fallow,
But for the cheers of Exeter's Walhalla.
Father of lights! if each in ignorance still,
Would grace engross against Thy general will,
Thou know'st that, as from Thee all creatures came,
Though for our wanderings each the other blame,
All seek, all love, all feel Thee theirs the same;
Just art Thou in ordaining what is fittest,
All wise in all Thou doest, all permittest;
The nearest they to Thy paternal soul
Who most revere, because Thou mad'st, the whole.

AUTHOR.

The day must come when men and states will be
Less selfish, more impartial, manly, free,
Considerate and consistent than we are;—
Who own a weakness for unequal war.

But piety and policy agree
About as much as law and equity.
The world is most consistent when a word
Is scarce required to prove its course absurd;
Observe the fashions; note a popular cry;
You'll wonder at men's unanimity;
But take a just and reasonable view
Of other's rights,—consistency, adieu!
Has any one the right to hold his own
Opinions against us, more potent grown
Lately than he? No, clearly not, not one.
Such is a Liberal faith in Tory tone.
Does an inferior power the course proposed
Defer a moment? Let his ports be closed!
What! does he argue? "Shell" him; there's some fun
In reasoning with the logic of a gun.
Thus one may hear from men who boast to be
Pure Liberals, theoretic tyranny
More gross than ever called down despot's doom,
Or stains the tale of Russia or of Rome.
Like views take our pugnacious pietists,
Who preach and pray with both their doubled fists.
Nothing is hard to the resolved mind;
Nor easy aught to one of wavering kind.
Impressed with the utility of slaughter,
As herald to salvation free and full,

We—military saints of the first water—
By virtue of our mission to the dull
Heathen, who cannot, or who will not, see
That state of holy peace and charity,
Which we declare our creed to cause and be;
Who resolutions pass, postponing votes
To save men's souls, till we have cut their throats;
Think, if on levelling towns to their foundations,
The wrecks are sown with pious publications,
Like "Come to Jesus," and "Why will ye die?"
And "Turn or Burn," and all that canting fry,
We may at once illustrate and confer
By our bombardments, sacks, and conflagrations,
The benefits of "the comity of nations,"
And our own mild and Christian character:
But this is rank hypocrisy. We know,
Whoever gives the first and unjust blow,
Is sponsor for all ills thenceforth that flow.
To strike in self defence is only brave;
Who suffers insult dubs himself a slave.
The notion of a conscientious juggler
Would move our mirth, and of a pious smuggler.
Yet act those very parts too lately we did,
Prescribing opium only where most needed,
And urgently required by certain courts,
Who doubtless viewed it as the best of sports,

To see their people dying from a seed
Of deathliest operation. We, indeed,
Grew, sold, and gained by the unholy weed.
But that says nothing; and beside is found,
Such premises go the press diurnal round,
The reason we can take such lofty ground.
Insist on smuggling or declaring war;
What else are we such rigid Christians for?
And if we've wronged, we flogged them; "what's the odds,"
They pay the bill; we charge them for the rods.
In this way, too, we justly are accused
Of "pampering" the Hindoos, who, merely used
To their own government, religion, laws,
And customs, lived content without good cause;
Till we, resolved upon their peace and good,
Their laws and lives have drowned in their own blood;
And without shred of title tell a nation
That all their goods are ours by confiscation.
Thus into pits of monstrous sins we fall,
And may with mildness pride unchristian call,
For Christian honour lives by honouring all.
England ought not for every trivial hurt
To ask mankind in general to eat dirt;
Nor force all weaker nations to reject
Each quality required for self respect.

Should one offend, we might consider first,
If our own conduct were not once the worst,
And fraud and rapine be not justly cursed;
Abase, for that, our pride before His sight,
And so humiliate sin by doing right;
Nor, claiming powers reserved to the Most High,
Vengeance profanely seek to justify.
We might admit that other men have souls,
And stand or fall to God as He controls;
That we are not the favourite sole of Heaven,
But that to all, with life, His love was given.
Assyria, Egypt, Persia, Græcia, Rome,
By all provoking, brought their own fate home.
But because ancient empires waxed still greater,
By grasping sway, we think, though living later,
And owning a more perfect rule of right,
To justify ourselves in Truth's despite,
By their example; blinding our own eyes
To views we grant in theory as wise,
But hold impracticable for the reason,
That conscience never calls at the right season.
We know, too, eighty years ago, the war
With western planters waged, how popular!
King, Lords, and Commons, strove we not to breed 'em
All possible ills, and slay their newborn freedom?

And don't we now, ashamed of such proceeding,
Admit we suffered righteously the bleeding
We got at Lexington and other places,
And bolt our ill-luck with as few grimaces
As may be; and would you now tell a Yankee
That we were justified in—?

CRITIC.

I? No, thank ye.

FRIEND.

The singular consistency, of course,
Our conduct shows, proceeds but from the force
Of our convictions, that no other state
Has gumption for itself to legislate.
And British wiseacres still gape with wonder,
Why France, who's made so many a mortal blunder,
Don't choose again to rend herself asunder;
How, without endless editorial gabble
The Chambers to advise with club-house babble,
A democratic empire can pursue
A policy foreseeing, fixed and true;
Or government can carry on its business,
And its head show no fatal sign of dizziness;
Most, how a system, so ill fortified,
As but to have the people on its side,

The army, and the clergy, does not fade
Before a Q. C's. scurrilous tirade;
And traitors who on treason try to trade.

CRITIC.

Mankind for victims each the other choose;
We gain our end, but all things else we lose.
Belief, say some, depends not on the will;
But credit's optional, I fancy, still.
That men should hate each other seems their lot;
That you forgive each other, matters not;
You've both offended me, and on the spot
I'd have you punished, but some poor relation
Would always bother me for compensation;
Not for your loss, but for his degradation.
A man's a public nuisance, it is proved;
His office is offensive, he's removed;
There's still to pay, that's all that's ever plain;
If well, for pleasure; and if ill, for pain.

AUTHOR.

One thing is certain; if I'd had to pay
For counsel such as this, I'm bound to say,
I'd have lost something else beside my way.

CRITIC.

Bards err by method, and by system stray.

Their course is one perpetual deviation,
Under the superintendence of stagnation.
I showed one once, who, great in perturbation,
Was running out of breath to find himself,
The object of his search lay on the shelf.

AUTHOR.

True bards are rare birds truly; ages pass
Without, sometimes, an instance of his class,
And seen, at best, as oft by mortal born,
As fay-queen cantering on her unicorn.

FRIEND.

One use of reading is to learn to shun
Doing what others have already done.
A poet therefore ought to be well read
In all his brother bards before have said.
Now music's signs by all can forth be rung,
And figures speak an universal tongue.
From Cork to Petropaulskoi an equation
Is by the school-boys known of every nation.
So certain tastes are common to all times,
And certain products almost to all climes;
As generally met with as a crow,
Or Scotchman, wheresoe'er you chance to go.
No doubt you'd not have thought it very easy
To meet a white man by the black Zambisi;

But there he was; and if, perchance, employed
In 'prospecting' a bran new asteroid,
Ae braw Scot wad be loomin' in the void.
But truly to esteem the date you must
Cross the blue seas, and breathe the desert dust;
Olive, or grape, or orange, Alp and wave,
Ere rightly you appreciate, all must brave.
So, to enjoy the bards of every land,
You must their native idioms understand;
The highest luxury this at taste's command.
To read translations is to list reports
By lackeys made of what goes on in courts.
Read poets in their native tongues, you'll own
You are speaking with a king upon his throne.
Translations of all other scribes may pass;
Wits are a somewhat miscellaneous class;
Dear Euclid reads as brilliantly in Dutch
As Greek; and I admire him just as much.
But nought may match, howe'er a version please,
The original poet's careful harmonies.
Translated, they are just the thing not wanted,
Like soda water, or champagne decanted.

AUTHOR.

'Twould make some few of your objections vanish,
To read Nahuatlaque versified in Spanish.

FRIEND.

And prose, though Plato's, or howe'er divine,
We measure by the page; verse, by the line;
As gold in quantity however great,
By the ounce Troy; for worth is more than weight.
Were I now called upon to give advice
To a novice, on poetic mysteries
Unalterably bent, I'd not convey
A single difficulty from his way.
The roughest mountain hides the richest mine;
Toil, hate, contempt, are theirs by right divine,
Whose souls in Heaven shall brightest, calmest shine.
As pupil I assume, unbroken, he
Would keep the sacred seal of secrecy;
For bards, most inconsistent, as 'twould seem,
Hate notoriety (as cats hate cream);
And yet can no more live without publicity,
Than olive oil apart from its lubricity;
Decry renown, yet seek it oft in vain,
And finding, feel it, though a mental pain,
Sweeter than sugar or the sugar cane:
To such an one I might make bold to say,
Still, strict, at first, your privacy retain,
And this wise fix the studies of the day.
Greek be your even song, and Greek your matin;
Primes, nones, and tierce, Italian, English, Latin.

Read priestly Hesiod, servant of the gods,
Born at the foot of their divine abodes;
Read Homer,—Græcia's, earth's sublimest scribe,
Monarch of bards and beggars.

CRITIC.

The same tribe.

FRIEND.

There stand his two great works, alone, supreme,
Like pyramids by the shore of Time's dark stream.
Of verse the legislator born, and sire,
His thoughts are white with heat, his words strike fire;
But when his theme soft sweetness may require,
How rich, how delicate his accents roll,
Like ewe milk quaffed out of a maple bowl.

CRITIC.

Homer to overpraise seems scarcely possible,
The fountain of all human lore cognoscible.

AUTHOR.

If possible, I hardly deem it wrong;
Each verse, each luminous wavelet of his song,
Makes it own music as it rolls along.
The wretch who doubts the half divine reality
Of Homer, and his human personality,

Be he anathema; and no misnomer;
It's next to atheism to doubt Homer.

FRIEND.

Read mighty Æschylus, whose harmonies,
Polysyllabic, would, in days like these,
Crush critics' jaws, or else their theories;
Mature in thought and sad, wise Sophocles;
Pathetic, politic Euripides;
Moschus, Bion, Theocritus, and all—
They are but few—whom minor bards we call;
Sage Solon, not forgetful of his claims
To rank his own 'mong Athens' noblest names,
The very man who would forgive a debtor,
But himself hold severely to the letter;
The awful hymnist Orpheus, bard of fable;
Theognis and his fellows; who so able
Paullo-post-prandial truth, at his own table,
To teach? those genial views and moral platitudes
Of brains the wine warms to its native latitudes?
And, barring his tremendous oath don't stagger us,
Study the golden verses of Pythagoras;
The odes of Pindar; he with Homer shared
The conqueror of the world's divine regard;
Anacreon, Aristophanes, together
May quell the effects of suicidal weather;

The fragments epicene of Sappho fair;
Aratus and Manilius, pious pair.
So far of Greeks in chief; but add the strong
And triple code of Argonautic song,
Theme grandly fabled. First of Romans, next,
Ponder Lucretius' philosophic text,
Not godless, nor with godlessness perplexed,
But with the lack of one omnific hand,
Adjusting all things made by Him and planned,
And gnat-like dance of atoms, understand
None can; the Æneid; he indeed would urge ill
Who between Homer interposed and Virgil
His claims: him love, his archetype adore;
Read Ovid, rich in rare and fabulous lore,
And strains of starry import; few before
Love's law-giver, who since? delight us more;
Sterner in morals than in judgment sage,
Lucan, who penned the epic of his age,
Unconscious that the time had come again
When law and equity, one soul made twain,
Proved either monarch must, or mobarch, reign;
Wise Juvenal, and Persius, not too plain,
But pure in soul, just, who the right maintain;
And Horace, happier than those judge-like twain;
Of power more varied and more perfect art,
But less severely virtuous in his heart,

And courtlier. Read the elegiac three
Male graces, somewhat coarse, but let that be—
Catullus, and Tibullus, and the third,
Propertius.

CRITIC.

Im-Proper-tius, I have heard
Suggested, as a more appropriate word.

FRIEND.

Italic Silius, Claudian, and Ausonius,
Are more or less pure writers and harmonious;
But nothing say so grand as to astony us.
Callimachus and Martial, epigrammatists,
One scarce dare name with epic bards and dramatists.
But Plautus, Terence, Seneca, all known
For stern, droll, tender, high, or seerlike tone,
Are well worth careful conning, one by one.
These for the ancients will suffice, we'll say;
Read, first of moderns, Dante's threefold lay,
Reformer he and censor of his day;
Who on an angel's pinion, so to speak,
Carries you through Creation in one week.
If aught of kindred feeling in your mind
Religion, love, or chivalry should find,
Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso; all
Will please you best in the original,

And so will Petrarch; still, in case of need,
Take up with the vernacular; but read.
No epic have the Spaniards of their own,
Unless The Cid we substitute for one;
To dignify to such extreme the ballad,
Were to proclaim a royal feast of salad.
The epic or dramatic forms of art,
Alone, sufficient dignity impart
To national events or hero-stories,
As makes them the apt settings for such glories.
Camoën's Lusiad, which we know alone
Through Mickle, mimic of Pope's monotone;
And this as far remote from truth we feel
As the ten-millionth copy of a steel-
Engraving can be from the unblackened plate,
'Mong epics takes but an inferior state,
From its confused celestial machinery,
Though good in characters, events, and scenery;
Fancy Olympus made a rural deanery.
Telemachus, than modern epics fuller
Of moral wisdom—than old epics duller—
Hath, not the less, some beauties of its own,
Sprung from the Christian heart and saintly tone
Of thought, that marked the life of Fénélon;
The only priest who ever wrote a poem,

By rule and spell of art, which may compare
With those majestic works by which men swear.

CRITIC.

Let priests be priests, it's quite enough to know 'em
In that capacity. The sun shines fair,
We want it neither all-ways nor all-where.

AUTHOR.

That Pollok was a priest, must be confessed.

CRITIC.

And paraphrased the Bible at the best.

AUTHOR.

Young?

FRIEND.

For the instance I your memory thank;
Young wrote—in verse particularly blank—
Some essays sombre and, by fits, sublime;
Though his theology be somewhat hazy,
And poor Lorenzo's morals drive one crazy;
But all regardless of plan, scene and time;
As void of all construction as of rhyme.
Read Voltaire's Henriade; not sublime, I own,
But *au contraire,* the neatest epic known.

He, too, less stately, treads that tragic stage
Corneille and Racine, the by-passed age,
Both purified and dignified. The lays
Of olden chivalry, and fabulous days,
The Romance of the Rose and Brut of Wace,
Diseur, and Northern Trouvère, and Jongleur,
And amorous ditties of the Troubadour,
France glories in, peruse; and read to praise
Béranger's lyrics gay; he most melodious
Of songsters Frank; the rest are mostly odious.
The Edda next, and Nibelungen Lied,
The earliest lights of Northern fable read;
Those earliest lights of song, which but to praise
The proudest privilege forms of feebler days;
As stars the brightest in night's holy sphere,
The first to come are last to disappear.
Poetic music Germans have, but less
The harmony of numbers can express
Than even Chinese, Cherokee, or French;
Gaelic scarce gives the jaws a deadlier wrench;
The reason why, ask Dean Professor Trench.
In Schiller's wondrous drame, still, Wallenstein,
And Wolfgang's Faust, flames forth the fire divine,
In many a solid thought and glowing line.
Mark in those names the standards of two schools,
That which consults, and this which spurns all rules.

In noble thoughts and philosophic views
Of nature, life, man's duties, the French muse
Is—might we nationally so distinguish—
Than the Teutonic poorer, or the English.
In strict artistic treatment of a theme,
Pride patriotic, passion's sinful dream,
Ambition's plot, or faith's fanatic scheme,
The Frankish among moderns sits supreme.
Our British bards, we may indeed suppose,
The novice from his earliest childhood knows.
Of such, perhaps, the greatest, from the time
He anything could spell in prose or rhyme.
Read Chaucer, in black letter; Spenser's lay
Skip not one lonely line of; blockheads may;
Admire in Shakespere's comprehensive mind
Wit, humour, pathos, grandeur, truth combined;
Each character an abstract of mankind.
The lesser dramatists of Shakespere's day,
More curious are than useful, in our way;
And you may just consult them or ignore them;
For Memory in her closet scarce will store them;
And in the race of fame they sadly thin off;
But Jonson reads like Milton with the skin off;
Muscle, nerve, bone, and fine articulation;
But still an anatomical preparation.

While later, Otway, Addison, and Rowe
More pure, pathetic, but less potent know.
Scan Milton's strains with reverence; but in them
His partial creed and faulty faith condemn;
And let all learn to love the holy plan
Of rendering happy universal man.

CRITIC.

Consider, Milton was a Puritan;
The Puritans were heroes.

AUTHOR.

Should we grant
That they were heroes in a state of rant,
And half believed their self-deluding cant;
Still they were greater hypocrites, because,
A vast respect pretending for God's laws,
They violated greater than they kept,
Like Pharisees, for others' sins who wept,
And perpetrated viler of their own,
On slight pretext, against both shrine and throne;
And all of sober judgment to them known.
The Covenanters who would not brook to pray
By set forms, nor in any but their way,
We can respect; but men who slew, one day,

The least of tyrants, and a few years later,
Bore without murmur one immensely greater,
I cannot honour much; nor do I know
What are the blessings we to Roundheads owe;
Nor what the laws or liberties we trace
To the vast virtues of that rebel race.
Men sacred duties have, I grant, and secular;
And to discharge the two, hold not irregular;
But think him little better than insane
Who boasts, by shedding blood, to blend the twain.
An apostolic saint, besmeared with blood;
Or chaplain, sword-in-hand, who, for their good,
Slays without mercy, men, and cries "no quarter,"
So perfect in the vital grace of slaughter,
Patron of plunder, death's devoted friend,
How can mere Christians consciously defend?
So, if you call upon me to admire
A saintly hero, crying, "Present,—fire,—
Fix bayonets," I can't do what you require.
That he his duty does in his profession,
And nobly earns the cross in his possession,
And nothing earthly would exchange instead of,
I grant you; but, to blow his brother's head off,
I cannot look on as a Christ-like act,
Nor compliment him on that deadly fact

Of bloodshed, which with Christian reason jostles,
Nor hail such acts as acts of the Apostles.
A Christian murdering brethren to God's glory
Appears to me a most incongruous story.
He might as well take all the law that's left,
And glorify adultery and theft.
To say he does so upon public principle,
Appears to me no argument invincible.
If public principle demands the cession
Of all the sense or grace in my possession,
I'll own myself at once a graceless wretch,
And sell my sense for anything 'twill fetch,
Or hasten to abjure the stern profession.
When once a man feels sermonish or psalmy,
That man's no longer business in the army,
Where either duty must with conscience clash,
Or he of both will make a dreadful hash.
His conscience tells him 'twere a heinous sin, to
Dismiss an unprepared spirit into
His Maker's presence; but stern duty urges,
And all reluctance, deluge-like, submerges.
But does that, morally, acquittance give
To one who might escape the alternative?
Or how can conscience, irresponsibility,
When once enlightened, plead, of brute docility?

CRITIC.

I rather grieve that upon points like these
You hold such strange, fantastic theories;
And much I marvel, for all this and that,
What, for the blood of me, you would be at;
But let's have done with soldiering, if you please.

FRIEND.

Cowley, and Quarles, and Heywood read; then Waller,
Whose verse was smoother though his thought was smaller.
Read Dryden, Pope, Swift, Prior, Churchill, Gay,
Each one a master in his several way,
With what delight or deference you may;
Who bitter sayings blend with thoughtful smiles,
Burnt in and brilliant like encaustic tiles;
They are our useful bards of every day;
But lofty never nor profound are they:
Plain, practical, and shrewd, coarse common sense
Rounded and polished, sums their competence.
Those wicked wits, we know the cutting things
They wrote, and armed their wingèd words with stings.
But they delight us little. 'Twas a period
When honesty and honour each seemed very odd;
And virtue, wheresoever she might go,
Was constantly regarded as *de trop*,

And always out of place; and each but made,
In men's eyes, to be bartered or betrayed;
And modesty a ghost that's quickly laid.
Pope's noblest work, his Essay upon Man,
Claims a sublime and comprehensive plan,
Devout in strain, yet, (strange and sad behaviour,)
He holds his theme complete without a Saviour.

CRITIC.

He fancied, I suspect, 'twas rather odd,
That one should come between "A. Pope," and God.

FRIEND.

Yet though condemning much in those first named,
Is much unequalled; be there much unblamed.
With Thomson, Cowper, Akenside, there sprung
A purer diction on the muse's tongue,
Whose former filth escaped from, we, once more
Are urged by pompous critics to explore.
Gray, Collins, Goldsmith dwell on every tongue;
We justly glory in the lays they sung.
Be Merrick, Shenstone, Byrom, not despised,
And Barbauld's pious raptures duly prized.
Add Ossian, Cædmon, and the bards of Wales,
Who chant in Kymric strange and mystic tales,
Though o'er their age a cloud of doubt prevails:

Blair, Beattie, Mason, Southey, Coleridge, Moore,
Burns, Campbell, Crabbe; and Scott I named before.
Rogers, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Hogg,
Names uncontested, close my catalogue.
On those more recent I shall not insist;
I don't think any name of note is missed
That's necessary to be known, I mean,
Though writers by the hundred intervene.
On reputations of the loftiest style,
Old Time reserves his judgments for a while.
Those only are distinctly ascertained
To which inferior marks have from the first pertained.
Thus, many a minor wit that we could talk over,
Has pocketed the stakes by a mere walk over,
Although he'd neither bottom, wind, nor speed,
And proved a very so-so nag indeed;
While others I could tell of, who have aimed
At great things and done greatly, live unfamed.
And if, as each of these, for his, hath claimed—
One only other strain to these belongs
Which seals the canon of earth's sacred songs—
With patronage of self who'd interfere?
And partial preference blends with all things here.

CRITIC.

Of female writers you have named but two,
Are these the only worthies, in your view,

Sappho and Mrs. Barbauld, named exactly
Because you thought they paired the most compactly?

FRIEND.

Precisely not. Are some few in our day
Both high and pure. The world can rarely say
What women write hath led mankind astray.

AUTHOR.

What think you of the general female mind
Contrasted with the male of human kind?

CRITIC.

Nature hath not to sex or class confined
Her noblest gifts; so every now and then
Are women found with minds surpassing men.
Kind Nature loves exceptions most because
They soften her severely general laws.
Women, says Mr. B. in his instructive
Lectures, have minds preëminently deductive,
Inductive, men; (I doubt whether the particle's
Precisely proper to the several articles)
But this I think is clear, that his division
Fails from a lack of logical precision.
Beside the inductive, and deductive modes
Of reasoning, much the nearest of all roads

Is the intuitive; and that, we know,
The short cut, by their instincts, women go;
Indeed they only in perfection hold
Those faculties more fine than finest gold.
But were the Lecturer's dictum true, then they
Would be the first logicians of the day;
But fact and Nature fail him at this point,
And so the Theorist's theory's out of joint.
For mark how rarely women follow out
A train of reasoning; they've no time to doubt;
You argue with them a whole summer's day;
And they'll refute whatever you don't say.

FRIEND.

Well;—to continue what we talked before;
Of oriental bards, we little more
Know than a few translations, weak and poor,
Enable us to judge their sacred lore;
But some no doubt are better, some are worse,
And anything is better than bad verse.
Sakontala read, and such Indian lays
As are transferred to English in these days,
Though Sanskrit seems a study worthy praise;
The Bhagavat, Mahabarat; note in these
The many half divine resemblances

Which may with other mythic tales be traced,
Whether the scene be east or westward placed;
Firdausi; you'll not master in the Persian,
If unassisted by an English version,
His sixty thousand couplets in a trice;
Let Atkinson's abridgment then suffice,
Though base beyond forgiveness in the sample,
He oft-times gives of the bard's genius ample;
To whom his native land's religious mystery,
Traditions, laws, wars, and primæval history,
The orb supply whereon his creatures move
'Mid fairies, fiends, and kings; heroic love;
Adventures age may blame, but youth defends;
Just arms; and labours virtue must approve.
I love those grand old works wherein we find
The vast completeness of one master mind,
Who, like some provident despot, blandly bends
Subjected powers to his majestic ends.
Hafiz and Saadi; melancholy wise
In mirth, and sadness which from mirth will rise,
And varied knowledge of life's vanities.
Know fierce Antar, the Arabs' hero-bard,
Who sang, who bled for one divine reward,
His lovely Ibla; Ah! his countless toils,
And triumphs; his bereavements, and his spoils;

Where steps his foot, is war; where'er he gains,
He glorifies a conquest by his strains.
Though dead, his body, lifeless as it was,
Protects, with spear in rest, his people's secret pass.

CRITIC.

All nature forms the base of the bard's song;
To him all lore, all sciences belong.
From the Creation downwards Homer knew
The rise of gods and mortals; Virgil, too,
And Ovid sang according to the view
Deemed philosophic, of those distant times;
Why show not now our bards, in serious rhymes,
How luckless man first lost his fishy shape,
But soared sublime through reptiles to the ape,
Through apes to men? How many on the way,
Stopped at some half-way house were hard to say.

FRIEND.

Facts fabled; as of Arkles, god of day,
Whom some abysmal monster thought to dish,
By gorging; but that hero through the fish,
(Disdaining to go backwards, bend, or double,)
Fought his way out 'mid much intestine trouble;
A solar myth of prehistoric ages,
Known but to Dr. Smith and the seven sages.

CRITIC.

Philosophy, like Stilton cheese, is found
To please us most, when just a thought unsound;
In proofs of this your novelists abound.
We don't like sheer corruption, as is seen
In atheistic writers, coarse, cold, mean;
But less object to a capacious scheme
Where, whether Power Creative be, or seem,
To infer is optional; you can't misdeem.

AUTHOR.

But suits not such the poet, nor his theme.
The theory of progression seems, to me,
To squeeze a surplus from deficiency.
To Nature truest, bards in gracious tone
All things as emanant teach from God alone;
Among the faithful, faithless was but one;
For whose sole sin let his pure life atone.

FRIEND.

Philosophy, no doubt, the bard should study,
And metaphysics; though the stream be somewhat muddy,
The fount is fair and pure and deemed divine;
And Ethics, which our moral laws define;
Rights, duties, interests, ties, which lure men, guard, combine.
In that grand region, lo! prepared to greet us,
Beside the three supreme, stand Epictetus,

Simplicius, Hierocles, and Marc Aurelius,
Who though an Emperor scolds (and pretty freely) us,
And Seneca.

AUTHOR.

I much admire these men;
And Arrian I've read through and through again.

CRITIC.

Read History; solid and substantial fare;
Thucydides, and Cæsar, Hume, Voltaire;
Him who in Greek of Romans wrote, Polybius,
Which makes us class him as a scribe amphibious;
Plain Xenophon, stern Tacitus, curt Sallust,
Hard-headed fellows these, with heaps of ballast;
No flighty fits, no legends, no ridiculous
Fables, like much in Diodorus Siculus,
Herodotus, Livy, Plutarch and Procopius,
(I name not Justin, Florus or Eutropius)
And monkish chronicles so wild and so pious;
But full of revolutions, treaties, fights,
Long speeches, embassies, huge wrongs; crimes; rights
Overthrown, or gained, by tumult or intrigue;
By states in conflict, or by kings in league;
And not to o'erload your memory with old writers,
We'll none less pure, name, nor less known inditers.

FRIEND.

The pith of ancient history's aggregation,
Of conquests made by some hard-fisted nation,
Until it ends in one huge concentration,
Which by its own weight yields to separation.

CRITIC.

Our modern annals give to separate states
The vivid interest of divided fates.
Read Montesquieu, Müller, deep in Dorians,
And Machiavelli, prince of all historians;
No wits on earth can generalise so well,
Nor theorise as those of *France la belle.*
Rollin, De Thou write well; and that Bonnechose
Is full of good things every student knows.
Read Gibbon, grand from opening to his close.
Macaulay's all good gifts, we own, but then,
Not quite, according to judicious men,
So perfect in all matters of the pen
As yet he might have been; and of the Stuarts
He speaks in terms that grate on not a few hearts;
Strong, polished, clear, concise; more copious Alison
Deserves not, for that cause, the Muse's malison.
A vulgar prejudice whoever cherishes
Wastes life in pampering that which hourly perishes.
There is a beauty in itself diffuse,
Yet of Ionic grace, and clearest use

In luring through a work, of bulk extensive
Yet, say not more than duly comprehensive,
Of age-long struggles, and those vast events,
The staple of the historian's arguments;
Where thrones and conquests shine as accidents;
For kings and nations cast into war's crucible,
Are not at all the same as first producible;
The style of proverbs, curt and cramp'd, grows tedious,
And best fits spelling-books, and cyclopædias.

FRIEND.

Time was; when centuries seemed to roll apace,
And nought whatever to have taken place,
Save heroes' births, the glories of their race.
Time is; and lo! contrasted, now with then,
The age of great events and little men.

CRITIC.

True: marching down the Strand the other day
I met a band of placards on the way,
Announcing, for mankind's alleviation,
A grand approaching reconciliation,
Between the Chartists and the British nation;
Thinking of Bruce and Comyn I paced quicker,
And stern Kirkpatrick's motto "I'se mak sicker;"
The hall of conference gained in time to learn
That three great orators had had their turn,

And that an eminent statesman once in prison
For talking nonsense, but who since has risen
To head the people now for mere amusement,—
To goad a lazy hour his sole inducement,—
Had, with a magnanimity outshined
Only by those who have most wronged mankind,
Enjoined his "tail" to cease its contrariety,
And rather patronise (than not) society.
Struck with the vast importance of the fact,
I marvelled, first, how Government would act;
But, in the end, reposed on its known tact,
In difficult crises, by the public backed.
The game was worth the candle, pretty clearly,
So I resolved to stay it out, or nearly.
I never was so smitten with the sense
Of sub-celestial benevolence,
As when, a minute after, I may say,
He told us, in his large and liberal way,
After a few broad and majestic passes,
Made, Mesmer-like, to magnetise the masses,
He had not clean forgot "the middle classes;"
But—though we don't deserve it—he, meanwhile,
Would help a lame dog o'er a crooked stile,
And meant, before we perished out of hand,
To save us, by assuming the command

Of things in general, from the channel fleet,
And Bank of England, to the "Pytchley Meet":—
Whereby we might, in due course, hope to earn all
The kind regards of Chartist pikes fraternal.

AUTHOR.

Time surely will be, when events and men
Will move with due equality again.

FRIEND.

Our tastes grow, as mind ripens, more historical;
We seek no meaning past the metaphorical,
And esoterics shun, and allegorical.
False in the letter, in the spirit true,
A phrase may shake the world, a creed subdue,
Meantime we know that one and one make two;
And likewise, though to tell it makes me grieve,
The more we know the less we can believe.
The more we ply the oracle, the less
Can we rely on its trustworthiness.

AUTHOR.

'Neath all this learning song may go to wrack,
And your last straw has fairly broke my back.
I must know all, you say, before I write,
Historians have thought prudent to indite.

For never sane man, I suppose, supposes
That what he knows for truth a scribe discloses;
All history to some purpose preconceived
Is written; to be cited, not believed.
The wildest dream that cloud-like blurrs man's mind
Not quite so drear nor meaningless we find,
As when one (fed on bread-stuffs and things edible)
Writes us a history and believes it credible.

CRITIC.

Know all this?—more! A bard must be well grounded
In those criterial rules whereon are founded
The principles of poesy as art,
And theory; or he can ne'er impart
Due majesty and grandeur of effect,
To the high fane whereof he's architect.
I'm all along supposing that in spite
Of twinkling trifles and mere motes of light,
Such as these scraps and crumbs I see you write,
You both possess the power and the intention
To found a poem of your own invention;
Some well-considered mass of various thought,
With judgment's most mature conclusions fraught,
In one consistent orb—ruled by one purpose—wrought.
I say to found a poem, as a state,
Or city, by some hero, led by fate;
For Maro and Æneas show like great.

FRIEND.

Bards must of learning have both stores abstruse
And common, fit for ornament and use.
Versed in all creeds, in jurisprudence, law,
Politics, œconomics, statics, draw
Still sparely from Dame Memory's golden store,
Who, more and more acquiring, hoards the more,
And justly grudges aught, unless to tried
Uses, and hands judiciously applied;
Refusing still, till oft fair fancy find
Like models in the maker's proper mind.
For did young bards their Aristotle know,
Longinus, Horace, Pope, Bysshe, Blair, Boileau,
They would not now perhaps such rubbish write,
As well might stagger the great Stagyrite.

CRITIC.

Nor would the bardic genius of the day,
Like Swiss flood on its suicidal way,
Dwindle into a mist of drivelling spray.

FRIEND.

A man's gestation of his work should be
Nine years, says Horace; sound adviser he.
Before you "pen a stanza" think an hour:
Many mistake activity for power.

CRITIC.

Let me, too, urge on your consideration,
And earnestly advise due meditation
Of theme and tone; and, ere you court the public,
Polish and shape, as bears their favourite cub lick,
Up to the last degree, the raw material
Of—doubtless—your forthcoming rhythmic serial.

FRIEND.

Oh, get you gone for serials. I'm quite sick of 'em;
Or black, or blue, or scarlet, take the pick of 'em;
And when you have done full justice to your slumbers,
Read—for refreshment—XXVI. of NUMBERS.

AUTHOR.

Accept my thanks, friends, for your kind attention.
You act upon the old saw of "prevention
Better than cure"; but even were I curable,
I know not whose advice were least endurable.
One says "Know all things ere you speak a word;"
"Better not cause an earthquake till you've stirred,"
Exclaims the other: this, at any rate, is
Proof of its value; the advice is *gratis*.
And though of course reproof is never liked,
The greatest gun is just as easily spiked
As any other, though of less calibre;
Which very thing chanced to the queen of Sheba,

Who, charged with all the wisdom of the south,
Was by a riddle foiled from a youth's mouth.
Just as in politics we find it well
That every party have in turn its spell;
When heaven and earth are sated of the Whigs,
The Tories take the bat, and play like rigs;
Each cries, in his own prophet's name, his figs;
It's my turn therefore now, or mine's a poor heart—
To give a bard's opinion upon your art,
And those who ply it with such gross success,
The pseudo-censors of the public press.
For, as a general rule, though grant I may
The present case points quite the other way
(May modesty offend you not, I pray),
A critic should start nothing of his own,
But draw his art-rules from the examples shown,
And reverently adopt his author's tone.

CRITIC.

Should he? As Mrs. Partington observes,
"There Paul and I"—proceed on different curves;
One goes to Coventry, and one to Bath,
And you may go to—either; choose your path.

FRIEND.

The Druid muttering from a hollow oak,
Made boors believe it was the tree that spoke;

Our Druids, too, work oracles, 'tis said,
But more by means of editorial lead:
Which, largely interspersed with all they write,
Gives weight to what the critic may indite.

AUTHOR.

Take the $\sqrt[3]{}$ of ignorance, + conceit,
× by malevolence — wit,
= the character, in this our time,
Of self-dubbed critics, ravers all on rhyme—
Our so-called judges of song, lilt, and lay,
Ode, epic, legend, tragedy, or play;
Judges whose robes so far from decked with ermine,
Are edged with hedgehogs' hides and suchlike vermin.
Never unanimous they, but to determine
Upon some great injustice; one forebodes
Their harsh decrees, too hard to mend our roads.

CRITIC.

How quite affected our young friend appears!
Oh! I could shed a cataract of tears,
With various grand and luminous effects,
More than a Surrey Garden bill detects,
To note the wreck stern reason will produce
'Mong powers whose only aim's to balk her use.
But I'm accustomed to select abuse;

Nor shall aught make me deviate in my mind
From praise or blame, as I most fitting find.
When first I take a poem, say, in hand,
I judge of it by rules myself have planned.
Thus:—Is the author's scheme capacious, new;
In itself total, based on tracings true
To nature and to art, and a just view
Of life and life's great laws? Is he original,
Or is he mercilessly bent to pigeon all
Writers before him? Mark! a bard may be
In great works too original; we would see
Links of the starry chain; submission free
To precept, and a proud obedience
To rules established by the finest sense,
Moral and critical; for—no offence—
Who solely on his own resources draws,
Lives like a bear by sucking his own paws;
A thriftless process. Is he plain and clear?
Does his design a lofty moral bear,
Or lowly? Does it serve a present good?
Or is it truth unripe, the future's golden food?
If either, 'twill outweigh some rhythm rude.
Forms it a varied, comprehensive whole,
The fair reflection of a liberal soul,
Who serving Nature, spurns, sometimes her laws,
And Art subjecting, vindicates her cause?

If passable in these things it appear,
I next note how it falls upon the ear.
For if fine thoughts are sweetly said, the better,
So are the soul and sense made each a debtor;
And poesie herself is doubly fair,
When she reflects the charms our charmers wear;
And as she sings the cherry lip or cheek,
We almost touch, we almost hear it speak.

FRIEND.

I detest metaphors of that description:
Do you, pray, peachy cheek and honeyed lip shun?

CRITIC.

This is the bard's gay science; thus he proves
How much of heaven he feels while earth he loves.

AUTHOR.

For all 'twere better, were there more like you;
But you are sole: I know not number two.

CRITIC.

Oh, you may think perhaps to take me off
By flattery, but the stuff's not strong enough;
Weak diluents I fear not,—scarcely hate;
I rather like corrosive sublimate.

FRIEND.

Critics have fewer faults in this our time,
Than ever since men first could write or rhyme;
And I remember "Edinburgh" and "Quarterly"
(The daughter who behaved her so undaughterly),
In all their palmy pride; now one offence
Only is theirs—to wit—incompetence.

AUTHOR.

The value of whose judgments may be gathered
By weighing those whose muse they fondliest fathered.
To one come Keats and Shelley; which was worst
Their only puzzle: ere this, to the first
Comes Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, Moore:
Your Prince of Critics shows them all the door.
Another comes; 'tis Hodgson! he's the man
Who'll do all great things that a poet can.
Alas! scarce even his euphonious name
Now brightens the illumined roll of Fame.
But when the clear discerning class had proved
The claimants' marks were not to be removed,
Oh, then—what raptures! how my lord he loved!
What depth in Coleridge, then! what wit in Moore!
Then, notes of admiration by the score.
Your leading critics, never, to their shame,
Though wise enough to doubt, and prompt to blame,
True poet recognised whene'er he came.

And why? because absorbed in their own smallness,
They'd measure by their inch a Titan's tallness;
And having stretched up almost to his ankle,
And found no end, they let their envy rankle,
And suck their thumbs in silence at the sight.
Or else they pay some small poetic wight,
Who more majestic minds will estimate,
As huckster casting up the world's estate;
The least of items for him far too great.
Such, like an elf of light evoked to span
Some solar angel's firmamental plan
(Both spirits, but by no means of one clan),
Having careered o'er continents, to rifle
A kingdom of a grass blade, or such trifle,
Affects and plucks just that which he can find,
'Mid boundless stores, suits his minutest mind;
To grander objects unallured, or blind.
But critics should be taught—if teach one might,
The witless wisdom, or the reckless right—
Their duties; if neglected, use the rod.

CRITIC.

The lads to flog the usher;—that seems odd

AUTHOR.

Nor reason with a brainless gasteropod;

Waxed fat, in stomach high and proud, no doubt,
Joined to humanity, perchance, by gout;
But lacking all those nobler traits that show
The race imperial, lords of all below.

FRIEND.

Poets are like the garrets where they grumble
Over their fate with long melodious mumble,—
Outside they're mighty high, inside as humble.
In Agamemnon's host were barely ten
Could estimate aright their king of men,
Or trace his future with prophetic ken.
Critics are fallible, say, now and then.
But if you've never published—

AUTHOR.

As is true.

FRIEND.

How have these critics so offended you?

AUTHOR.

I only take the just and general view.
Within the sweep, once, of an eagle's wing
A wren was caught, as in a whirlwind's ring;
And having with the balance of her wits
Escaped, and a succession of mild fits,

During a sharp attack of indoor weather,
She carves a pen out of her last tail-feather,
And sets up for a critic altogether.
And first, she must condemn the needless strength
Of such a bird, and his enormous length
Of wing, which truly stretched, from tip to tip,
Farther than she dared hop, or cared to skip.
As a just model of the feathered tribe,
She begged her own dimensions to describe.
Her if aught more offended in particular,
'Twas that he bore himself too perpendicular.
The creature, when at rest, stood well-nigh straight
And upright; this was sadly tempting fate;
All which he, doubtless, now perceived too late.
No matter that his sires had always done so;
He ought to stoop, and should not have begun so.
To stand bolt up was an un-wrenlike mode:
'Twas worse, 'twas human;—this she oddly showed.
Beside, his beak was crooked; and his talons
Scarce fit, she feared, for fashionable *salons*.
His hue too golden was; his eye too keen;
His flight too far, too high; his flesh too lean.
His cry she heard, as of a rended sphere;
But it meant nothing to her tiny ear;
And then how different to that low light twitter,
Which always sets her heart a patter-pitter.

As to his habits, she'd say nothing bitter;
Her nest, she knew, was never in a litter
With rams' horns, sheep-shanks, hare-skins, and old bones;
She'd rather win her bread by breaking stones
Than own, like him, a land-house and a water-house,
And make her drawing-room a private slaughter-house,
As his was known, from killing his own mutton;
But that weighed not, with her, a schoolboy's button:
In her just estimate of mental powers,
We never find, said she, a match for ours;
And sneer, nor jeer, nor any hint unkind
One moment dimmed the mirror of her mind.
And lastly, though she knew his judgment weak,
And, for the future, begged he'd shut his beak,
She hoped he'd profit by her kind critique.
The eagle heard—and heard—and did not speak.

CRITIC.

You, doubtless, are the eagle; I, the wren:
Old legends suit us well, both birds and men.

AUTHOR.

Grant now a revolution were required
In any art, 'twere most to be desired
In the vain critic's craft; and since they seem
Wildly besotted in some opiate dream

Of fancied worth and influence, it is time
Their misdeeds, more 'gainst reason than 'gainst rhyme,
Were shown them in that mild and suasive tone,
Which bards, alas! now cultivate alone.

CRITIC.

Proceed; I'm rather anxious mine were known.

AUTHOR.

Time was, when poets with affected heat,
Inflated verse, with proud tumescent feet,
Incessant wrought: no longer such we meet.
As traitors, brought some Eastern Khan before,
Bow their gagged heads, and leave them on the floor,
These worthies know we and their place no more.
Time was when English critics something knew
Of science, classic lore, and Eastern, too;
Of ancient annals, mythic legends, lays,
And deeds heroic of earth's earlier days;
Philosophies and sects that vexed the world,
Ere truth and Christian reason free unfurled
Their one united banner; such could then
Assist, correct, discern those who by pen
Would teach, or nobly charm, the minds of men.
But critics now, unhonoured yet by rhymes,
With base ambition, unlike that which climbs,
Burn to engross the ignorance of their times.

Our English 'know-nothings' of fearful fame,
Though dull, ungentle; though unfeeling, tame;
Who spurt their spongy quills made foul by use,
Plucked from the pinion of some rabid goose,
Content them now with verbiage and abuse.
Oft have I viewed with fervent indignation,
Some simple muse of modest reputation,
Whose timid air, unconscious of resistance,
Seemed to crave pardon for her mere existence;
Insulted, mocked, bespattered by this clique,
Whose brains had gone to play at hide and seek,
And never found themselves but once a week,
And that was when they slept too sound to speak.
These seek not to expound the scope or plan
An author hath, but spoil it all they can;
Till as the moon, whose orb in Heaven though bright,
In pools and gutters shows a perfect fright;
So in these filthy puddles of the press,
A book's distorted into ugliness.
No sense of truth is theirs, no aim to reach
The truths profound or high the work may teach.
But labouring hard, as greedy of disgrace,
Proud of contempt and a degenerate race,
As the first grins, the rest distort their face.
Thus may be marked, after a drenching day,
A chain of watery mire-holes block the way;

Each than the other shallower, till the last
Into mere mud and simple slime hath passed.

CRITIC.

Dispute all this although, of course, I could,
I can't defend my brethren as I would.
These of two classes, mainly, we shall find:
The first a very meddling, peddling kind
Of disappointed authors, who have sought
(But whose success is figured by a 0)
In various fields of literary fame,
To compass e'en the echo of a name.
So Aliquis, for all things proved unfit,
Asserts himself his opposite,—a wit;
And vagrant-tumbler-like, who, heels in air,
Delights the youth of some suburban square,
So blabs unconsciously his happiest art,
Whose head is, naturally, his heaviest part.
Poor Crispus wrote with such unlucky skill,
His books appeared and vanished, as at will
Of some curst wizard, born to breed them ill.
Each monstrous birth successive shoved aside
Its sickly senior, till the whole litter died
By secret and forefated fratricide.
Beginning with decline, 'twere hard to tell
So brief their life, what was it them befell.

By natural laws, as wise no doubt as deep,
They lay, and slew each other in their sleep.

AUTHOR.

Others, again, no authors are, not they;
But mere malignancy incites to say
The falsest, vilest trash they can invent,
And close their eyes to every good intent
Or noble aim that fires the author's heart,
So high above their mercenary part.
Take, for example, Old Jactator gruff,
Grave as an owl, and pungent as Scotch snuff;
His columns with sententious prose cram full,
And saws laconic, curt, but deadly dull.
Sugar may be from timber made, 'tis said;
But sugar from Jactator's knotty head
Would turn, methinks, to acetate of lead.
If authors would be just, perhaps they might
To form some testimonial unite,
And files of his own papers, largely planned,
With base just broad enough to fill the Strand,
Might a new fortress of oblivion stand,
In honour of Jactator; high would rise
The koprolithic mountain of his lies.
Just fate were his, if he, immured the while,
Hear, in the dungeons of that dreary pile,

Hard by, some doleful and congenerate fowl,
Some blind old buzzard, or some long-eared owl
(Which critic-like doth notably combine,
So lavish seems boon Nature to their line,
The owlish honours with the asinine),
Through wintry nights, monotonous in woe,
The wanderer warning of the wretch below.

CRITIC.

A man sometimes, if taken at his word,
Most suffers by his own success. I've heard
The following story, and avouch its truth,
As happening in my mediæval youth,
Nor foreign to our end, I beg to say:
Brave Bendigo, the Hittite, one fine day,
Intent on angling, or some peaceful play,
Took, to Trent's flowery banks, his gamesome way.
There, met a chum, who bet him, it would seem,
He could not hurl a brick-bat o'er that stream,
Both classic and romantic, as we deem.
Our hero, who had never fought a field
His stanchest foe was not too glad to yield,
Bendy, to thoughtless challengers too lenient,
Picked up the article—it lay convenient—
And, having whirled it once about his head,
Flung it clean over river, bank, and bed.

The wager paid, the champion gained his point;
But found he'd put his shoulder out of joint;
Went home dejected, racked with grief and anguish,
Without one victory doomed three years to languish.
Moral: take warning due; nor risk your wits
By railing, till you tumble into fits.

AUTHOR.

Once on the gallop, I'll not break my pace:
Give ear, ye critics, give; no more disgrace
The long auricular birthright of your race,
Whose length of ear is more than all Job's asses'
Divided into parallel, twin masses;
Give charitably, what ye largely can,
And learn some duties from superior man.

FRIEND.

Your aim would seem—since Aaron broached to Moses
His inconvenient scheme concerning noses,
The very strangest History discloses:
We can't wear critics' ears by way of posies.
According to the Talmud—

AUTHOR.

Oh, forbear;
I give it up. Their ears may critics wear
As long as monkeys' tails, for aught I care.

CRITIC.

You doubtless think the metaphor is witty;
And that it don't apply's the only pity.
The bards of every country, state, and city,
Each call their fancied foes such in choice ditty.
Most men have lucid intervals of reason
But bards; they will sing in and out of season,
And when you are least in humour still will teaze on.
It seems their favourite fault; for instance, now
You want with critics to get up a row,
And beard the guild; but that I'll not allow;
I hold myself their guardian, in the main;
Our art, the last refinement of the brain
Which human wit from all its stores can strain.

AUTHOR.

I don't feel tied to one especial trope;
I have more strings to my bow than one, I hope;—
As witness;—shun, pray, wheresoe'er ye be,
Dear critics, all steep places by the sea,
Lest those fine faculties which so befriend,
And so possess you, lure ye to your end.
Haunt, haunt in peace your snug, sonorous styes,
And Bacon's Essays study ere you rise.
When you've been salted with true Attic wit,
Or smoked, as to the public seems most fit,

The world will add you to its learned stores;
But, till then, you are only pig—my bores.

FRIEND.

Critic, you have the knife, but not by th' handle.
Don't try to poke a fire out with a candle.

CRITIC.

The warning 's somewhat tardy.

FRIEND.

Well; no matter.
Cool wins; keep cool; so that your teeth don't chatter.

AUTHOR.

Enwreathe your brows with fadeless flowers, I would,
Of speech, and trust provocative of good:
Like cuttle-fish ye flounder in the flood
That issues from your pens, of inky mud;
Like creeping mites, which, writhing into light,
Eclipses feel as murderously bright;
And shrinking, shriveling, in their own despite,
Die, just by visitation of the light;
Mere atomies, whose souls, with meanness fraught,
Must soar to seize a caterpillar's thought,—
A man's, a poet's, sends you clean distraught.

CRITIC.

You and your tribe will form a numerous clatch
Some day, I take it, about Colney Hatch.

FRIEND.

I often fancy critics mostly are
Much like that misanthrope who kept a bar,
The Dickens knows where—I don't; wordy war
Waging, for ever after, in the Press,
With all whose merit shocks their ill-success.

CRITIC.

You have said so much to put me on my mettle
That I propose now to "peruse and settle."
In vain along these leaves I cast mine eye
To find one piece of measured poetry;
But in disorder you are a grand adept:
There's scarce an instance where the metre's kept.

AUTHOR.

Judge as your nature prompts, your art prescribes,
They sting not me, a critic's taunts and gibes;
Forms, numbers, metres let him scan or square;
Thought, truth, invention, passion be my care.
If aught of truth in verse of mine you see,
And truth may moral or poetic be,

Goodwill nor mends nor magnifies its state,
Nor can ill, lessen nor deteriorate.
I bow to judgment; but have done my best;
Nought here may wake a blush, nor wound a breast,
The purest, tenderest. I permit the rest
To chance, or aught that's mutable and partial,
The press, to wit; and critics' fierce court-martial.

CRITIC.

Such drum-head justice, then, as you deserve
You'll have; for fear nor favour shall make swerve
The balance once entrusted to my hand.

FRIEND.

Good: weights and forfeits we all understand.

CRITIC.

Now, look ye; dare you call this stanza verse,
Writhing in wretched prose? what can be worse?
Virgil says Phœbus tweaked him by the ear;
It's well for you there's no Apollo near,
Or you'd have been a sign to all beholders;
For he'd have tweaked your head clean off your shoulders.

AUTHOR.

Go on. I'm silent. Your critique, be sure,
However trenchant, now, 'tis my turn, I'll endure.

FRIEND.

To kill, you'll find it easier than to cure.

CRITIC.

Friends flatter not, nor honest foes. Enough:—
I think your verses sufferable stuff,
But wanting power, polish, point, and ease;
Few will they profit; fewer will they please.
Their harshness too arises, I suspect,
As much from affectation as neglect.
To be impressive no one need be coarse;
Think not uncouth asperity is force.
Think not unequal numbers nerve convey,
More than a hobbling gait does strength display.
Words are but slaves. Learn order, music; then,
These papers burned, sometime resume your pen.
Let accuracy, grace, o'er all prevail,
Nor e'er in strictest formal method fail.
The highest inspiration Time records
Is in acrostichs couched and lineal words.
Despise the senseless jeer of "artificial;"
Art be your end, your mean, and your initial.
The art most perfect is most perfect nature:
Each works by strictest rules in form and feature,
And both by laws attain their loftiest stature.
For song is like the dance where thought and word,
True partners, each the other hath preferred;
Confessing, in their wildest whirl, those laws
Of harmony they both obey and cause;

For law comes after Nature, and restrains,
But still makes music in her golden chains.

FRIEND.

True; as regards the Great Omnific Cause,
Prior to all creation are His laws;
But as concerns the creature's comprehension,
Knowledge of fact precedes of law invention.

AUTHOR.

Dancing in fetters; I have heard before of it,
And now that it's explained I wish no more of it;
For nothing so confounds all cogitation
As an inexplicable explanation.
Prefer I must the chainless stream which flows
Just whence Heaven wills, and whither Heaven but knows,
Sloped in by nature's broad green banks alone,
Or closed by threatening cliffs with groves o'ergrown,
To leagues of dull canal, kerb'd uniform with stone.

FRIEND.

Granted; still, good we may from each produce:
Use hath its beauty, beauty hath its use.

CRITIC.

Take for your model Horace; perfect, he.

AUTHOR.

Our language bars approach; no classics we;

Our taste and our materials sadly worse,
Not less in architecture than in verse.

CRITIC.

If each but did what lay within his power,
Nor strove to strain a leaf into a flower,
Nor clipped the natural foliage of his style
Into a funeral urn or pagod pile,
Instead of cursed conceits we should have thoughts,
Units, tens, hundreds, where we now have noughts.
The ancients wrote, each, up to his own powers,
And hence their styles are models still for ours;
Let us adopt their plan, and we shall see
It is nature settles classics, and not we.

AUTHOR.

'Tis thought the world wants more than melody;
Truth more than either; and, to say the sooth,
The veriest bards out of themselves make truth.

FRIEND.

That cannot be. To her, eternal youth
And infinite entireness both pertain.
We, star by star, the spangles in her train
May, age by age, discern; but skill divine
Once and for ever wrought them where they shine.

CRITIC.

Phrases there are which own no kind of rules,
Like to the absolute levity of the schools,
Which Newton's gravity proved so many fools;
Abstractions, windmill giants of the brain,
Air-grinders, yielding reasoners nought but pain.
Such words I warn you of, it seems, in vain.
I grieve to think the poets mainly answerable
For more than all the wits here or in France are able
To o'erthrow of mind's inane impersonations,
Which sell us slaves to our imaginations;
A slavery worse than on the worst plantations;
And truly much embellish their fine fictions,
But plunge us in a sea of contradictions.
The hardest thing on earth I find to free
A man's mind of some fixed nonentity
There grown since childhood, till it comes to be
Of superannuated infancy;
Some mountainous bubble, which one serious breath
Whiffs into air and inessential death.

FRIEND.

We'll skip what the Angelic Doctor saith
On that head, and Duns Scotus answereth.

CRITIC.

Shall every ninny who can thrum on rhyme,
Break all our ear-drums without tune or time?

No; if we must be glutted, he, at least,
Is bound to bring us music to his feast.

AUTHOR.

All can write smoothly who can mend a pen,
The art of ushers, and their little men.
To write mere verses—never mind if dull—
Is just as easy as one's name at full.
Because a thinking being must have thoughts,
Although like 1, behind a regiment of 0's
In decimals, they may but show how near
How next to nothingness the things appear;
Or Portuguese accounts in countless reals,—
So small the coin they almost seem ideals.
For verse is but a mould wherein we pour
Gold, silver, brass, or lead; alike the four
It keeps, shapes, beautifies; alike it suits
The thunder-throated giants and dwarf mutes.

CRITIC.

But truth should be attractive.

AUTHOR.

So it should,
Men will be sued and wooed ere won to good.
And he who would to virtue force mankind,
By storming truth at them, may hope to unbind
The streams of dark ice by the northern wind.

Earth only yields her beauties and her flowers
To suns of softening, winds of loosening powers.

FRIEND.

We talk of truth much in this world of ours;
But, speaking in a mere commercial way,
Truth's is the only business that don't pay.
Truth took a partner, Wisdom, and 'tis said
Their only capital was in their head;
But, that's a fiction; for I knew them well;
And knew them both worth more than tongue could tell.
Compelled to get a few goods upon credit,
(You don't believe that? In their books I read it,)
Their paper, merchants held, was not negotiable,
And none but bankrupt bankers played the sociable.
Their house they stocked with good old fashioned ware,
Solid and sound; you need not dread the chair
You sat in would break down, and leave you—there.
Both worked so hard, and watched, that when to bed
One went, the other watched and worked in stead.
Yet grew not rich; their stock nor more nor less;
Failure seemed far more likely than success.
The world was satisfied with nought they had,
And called their goods indifferent; worse than bad.
Wisdom had some fine gold, too pure to sell;
The world preferred bright brass;—brass did as well;

Looked much the same, had some quite useful qualities;
And, after all—who cares about realities?
More vulgar metals they were not rich in,
But had some virgin silver; 'twas a sin;
The public only looked and asked for tin.
Beside, the hussy! not unlike a scullion—
How should she dare to deal in genuine bullion?
Jewels in stock they kept, and precious gems,
Most suitable for monarchs' diadems;
But sovereigns are not always to be found,
Who're worth their twenty shillings in the pound,
And go a shopping as a morning round.
Pearls of inestimable worth, and rubies
Glowing like love's own heart; but pearls, the boobies
Sought not, but oysters; so the neighbouring fish-man,
While they starved, throve; and died of fat, a rich man.
A gem Truth had, one pure and brilliant stone,
Would not bear cutting, must be worn alone;
There was some mystery in it; that was known,
(For Truth admitted it was not her own,)
Could only be explained to whomsoever
Became the purchaser; to none else, never.
The gem thus greatly talked of, many thought
Were better broken, and its fragments wrought
Into such shapes as fancy might desire,
Or size, as men of petty means require.

The price demanded seemed so very high,
That companies were formed who strove to buy,
But after the first offer ceased to try:
Truth would not tell, nor Wisdom act, a lie.
So they refused; and though nor food nor fire
Was in their house, and both were fit to expire,
They straightway took it back to its right owner,
As on it they could neither raise a loan nor
Sell it outright; thus doing, to prevent
All risk from malice or from accident;
What happed to aught beside they'd bear content.
Their wind, an ill-one, never veered, alas!
For gems the world would only tinted glass;
For gold, in varied grades of baseness, brass:
And thus the impending crisis came to pass.
One morning before business, they agreed
To take a walk; and, feeling they had need
Of breakfast, though their meals were scant indeed,
Truth bought a penny loaf, and paid the baker
In gold. "This time," he said, "he'd not mistake her."
To jump the counter, seize her arm, and call
"Police, Police!" as loud as he could bawl,
Took but an instant: frightened out of breath,
Truth, and her dear friend, both as white as death,
Were, the next moment, pounced upon by Constable
Q 90; who pronounced them girls from Dunstable;
Straw-bonnet hands, whose habits were most unstable;

He was quite sure, no better than they should be,
And he had often warned them where they would be,
Some fine day. All remonstrances unheeded,
And the gold coin impounded, they proceeded
From station to police-court, as was needed.
The coin assayed—'twas curious—but they found
Too pure, and worth more than the current pound.
"That only makes the roguery worse," exclaims
The magistrate (I never mention names),
"What business have these women, young or old,
The national brass to adulterate with gold?
How many they have ruined can't be told;
The baker's lucky his loaf was not sold."
The case was finished by the worthy "beak"
Remanding the twin smashers for a week,
To give a chance for some good friend to speak
To character. None came: so they departed
For six weeks at the wheel, quite brokenhearted,
A mob assembling to behold them "carted."
Policeman Q was publicly rewarded;
The case was duly, by the Press, recorded;
The baker bowed to, and the Court applauded.
Meantime their landlord a success achieved
Scarce credible, though facts may be believed.
He seized for rent; wrote, after due concoction,
A list of their effects for public auction;

Then, calling in a cunning lapidary,
The stock, they both agreed, was clean contrary
To common honesty, and so contrived
That, had they prospered, none could have survived
Beside, in the same business. So they treat
The whole as rubbish, and a barefaced cheat;
And but by classing all as counterfeit,
Would the wise public any purchase make,
But glory in the shame of their mistake.
Their term of punishment at length expired,
The pair discharged, their hair cropped short, retired
To live, the Lord knows how, on their own means,
And meditate at large on mundane scenes.
Perhaps they have some odd jewels in their pack,
They sell, when most they creature comforts lack
Perhaps, not able wholly to absent
Themselves from work, and keep their self-content,
They'll not begrudge, at times, to join in any
Labour, whereby to turn an honest penny,
To please the few, or benefit the many;
Snuff candles at a strolling players' barn,
Or teach fire engines their own hose to darn.
By these means, which you'll own both wise and truthful,
They munch a crumb apiece, and drink a toothful.
The above story you perhaps have heard,
If not as I have told it word for word,
But the main facts undoubtedly occurred.

It's likely to be true, but still, I dare say,
In fact—Time's rolling stock is mostly hearsay.
And aught that's bad we may, we must believe;—
A thief turn honest? nay, a saint may thieve.

AUTHOR.

How, then, mankind amend?

FRIEND.

The attempt is vain,
Each must improve himself, or all remain
E'en as they are. Nought else yields good so ample,
As a high aim successful; for example
Acts upon masses with despotic force,
And spurs on numbers to essay the course,
Who else were mere spectators, and attain
What strength and measured skill and sacrifice may gain;
Nor is to any, such attempt in vain.
For, as of old, through Virtue's temple, they
Must pass, who would to Honour's make their way,
'Tis in the struggle the chief glory lies;
To strive for honour is, itself, a prize.
Because your right hand mate hath missed his way,
He's not for that lost wholly, and for aye;
Walk gently, and the hope's not quite in vain,
He yet may march in Virtue's van again.

AUTHOR.

What is the wise man's influence in his day?
Is it the few, or many have their way?

CRITIC.

Here, to majorities the sway is given:
Rule, if you will, minorities, in heaven!

FRIEND.

The world is automatic, itself rules;
Wise men are sometimes upmost, sometimes, fools;
Those sometimes join the rest in foolish laws;
Corruption of the best these always cause:
The rule is, one or other without pause.
Nations have been accustomed so to curse
All courts and kings, as bound from bad to worse,
(When popular hopes have suffered a reverse,
However in themselves unjust or base,)
I fling my brief up;—kings have not a case.
But do we find the peoples any wiser
Than their crowned chief, or national adviser?
Are they less deep in ignorance and deceit,
Who man the yards, than who commands the fleet?
Was Nicholas the man who dreamed alone,
Of Russians, to subvert the Moslem's throne;
Or was it sixty millions dreamed as one?

Was George the Fifth the only man who share
Debenture, coupon, scrip, of solid air
Prized, purchased or transferred; and bought and sold
Aërial railroads to the realm of gold?
Search history through, and you will mostly find
The king's the measure of his people's mind.

CRITIC.

An army is a people organized,
A senate is a nation symbolized,
A monarch is a state idealized.

FRIEND.

Urge not in vain the medium state more blest,
And senates more of probity possessed
Than mobs or monarchs. Nothing stands the test;
And he whose aim is worst succeeds the best.
Shoot low enough, you'll something hit, be sure;
Your men of vagrant aim I can't endure;
Minds so refined and delicately nice,—
Reason's to them an intellectual vice
They ne'er contract, or 'scape from in a trice—
Whose end is barrel-organs, and white mice.

CRITIC.

If excellence consists in ill-success,
As some travestied logic seems to express,
There's nought, than verse like this, can merit less.

Blank verse you favour not, I see; with you 'tis,
Ignoring all its high and reserved beauties,
To scribble lyrics, one of life's first duties.
How rhyme defrauds a man of his intent,
And makes him go the way he never meant;
As poor Von Klam befel, whose leg of cork,
He wanting London, dragged him off to York;
Till pleased with half a thought they grow, in time,
Who frequent wheel the well-worn ruts of rhyme.
Stern Mentor to himself the bard must be,
And friend severe, his own best enemy;
If that you are not, why then attend to me.
Now, I observe, dipping in here and there,
An incompleteness, an unfinished air
In structure and design. The thought should rise
In every step or stanza you devise,
Until the mind attains the loftiest view
Of that it meditates at first to do.
Look every thought thrice over, through and through:
Let every phrase be in itself complete;
Be firm in finish, perfect in your feet;
Give the fair vowels their preponderance meet,
And the alliterate sounds their repetition sweet.
But ere you aught let pass, take heed and note
Less how it reads right on, than how 'twill quote.

Oh, rather draw one sunbeam clear of thought,
One fine, thin radius—if not perfect, nought—
Than, like a rainbow in convulsions, scatter
Conceits which have no kin in mind or matter.
Give simple themes like style. The village may,
Who field and thicket rambles—rude as they—
For wild flowers, which, inwove, are round her thrown,
Neck, arms, and waist, in one continuous zone;
Alike with Empress on her jewelled throne,
Please each in proper place, please there alone.
Pure English is, in songs and lyric pieces,
Exactly proper, and their charm increases.
But grander aims insist on nobler style;
For wilful beggary is always vile;
And to use nought beside the Saxon phrase is
To polish paving-stones and pot dog-daisies.
In lyrics, ballads, and in general rhymes
Avoid all involution; but, at times,
A just inversion gives a saying strength,
Adds to directness force, and grace to length;
The words turn back and look you in the face,
Like gold-winged dragons, somewhat past their pace
By fair Armida urged, with haughtier grace.
Be clear, be simple, be to Nature true;
She hoards her beauty and her wealth for you:

And while whole heaps of sterling gold lie round,
None but the base would forge; yet such are found;
For song pure gold was, first; to gilt declined;
And now, 'tis imitation gilt we find.

FRIEND.

I beg you'll write intelligibly. Try
The mental measure of some human fly,
Which buzzes in the name of Critic; then
Seize it, and cork it in your goose-quill pen,
As Indians do their gold-dust. It must be
From its minuteness quite an oddity.
Use words that little babies all may know;
Di-vide your syl-la-bles by hy-phens, so;
Study those glorious works of Mrs. Trimmer's;
Consider horn-books; meditate on Primers.

CRITIC.

I thought you an ally of mine; but fear
You are inclined to play the traitor here.

FRIEND.

The fact is, I enjoy a conversation
Spiced with a sprinkling of recrimination;
And 'tis my habit, that, in any case,
Whichever turns to fly, I join the chase.

AUTHOR.

As the poor shell-fish of the Indian sea,
Sick—seven years sick—of its fine malady,
The pearl (which after shall enrich the breast
Of some fair princess regal in the West)
Its gem elaborates 'neath the unrestful main,
In worth proportioned to its parent pain,
Until, in roseate lustre perfect grown,
Fate brings it forth, as worthy of a throne;—
So must the poet, martyr of his art,
Feed on neglect, and thrive on many a smart;
Death only, may be, gives him equal right,
And nations glory in his royal light.

FRIEND.

Fame were a worthless object of desire,
If fame alone be that whereto aspire
Your heroes of the harp, and lordlings of the lyre.
The heroic benefactor of his age,
The judge, the legislator, civil sage,
Alike with Kill-craft on his cadent stage,
Scarce more,—Fame's ever wagging tongue engage.

AUTHOR.

The true poetic soul doth aye incline
In love to all things lovely and divine;
To all, fair Nature! that we greet as thine;

Yea, greet like children, to whose clear young eyes,
As half remembering something in the skies,
Still lovelier, only with serene surprise,
All things are full of poetry.

CRITIC.

I doubt it;
To wit, near all these verses are without it;
They have too much a dull, grave, sombre cast;
Not light, nor piquant, the prevailing taste;
Which you must study, yes, you must indeed,
Or hope not, dream not, ever to succeed.

AUTHOR.

Succeed? Oh no! but to himself the bard
Will sing, though none reward him, nor regard
His singing; though a publisher would rather
See, any day, a dray-horse in a lather,
Than Pegasus, who never turns a hair
(God bless him), though he's here and everywhere,
Fleeter than telegram; which if you despatch it
Eastward,—from Exeter suppose to Datchet,—
Not Time, not light, not horse-patrol can catch it.

CRITIC.

Beg pardon, but I heard Professor Faraday,
Whose scientific knowledge none would parody,

Say 'twould go six times round this earthly ball
Ere one could let his foot, uplifted, fall;
A fact you scarcely can conceive at all;
But if you multiply perpetual motion
By infinite space, you'll realise the notion.
I tried; and was surprised it came so pat;
There was no sum could stop me after that;
Long furrowed ciphers which o'er acres reach,
And logarithms, figures seemed of speech.

FRIEND.

Just that; you can prove anything by figures;
(I hate those nasty crooked little niggers).
A man here shows that if I ne'er had sheared
My chin, from youth, I should have now appeared
With seven and twenty foot, at least, of beard;
And this because it grows a line a day;
All which immortal fame I've rasped away;
Lost to humanity that grand example,
And treat the world to but a six-inch sample.

AUTHOR.

Not that a poet should spend all his time
In making rocks re-bellow with his rhyme;
In mooning o'er the modest sunflower's praises;
In strumming streams, or blubbering over daisies;

But,—I repeat it—bard, where'er he be—
In heart with all combined, in spirit free,
Will find himself his own best company.

CRITIC.

I'm quite of that opinion, since you've said it;
And think the rare discovery does you credit.

AUTHOR.

And, as some serpent, who, her natural soul
Hath lost to man for music, will unrol
Or intertwine her body's shining rings,
At his mere will, who opes and seals the springs
Of life within her, like the silver keys
Of ivory flute, and irritates at ease,
Or soothes, but charms her wheresoe'er he please,
Until, translated for obedient skill
Into his breast, she nestles and is still;
So treats the bard his theme; and calms or burns
Till whence it issued, it, at last, returns,
And he, in his own heart, his guerdon earns.
The world perchance is with him; perchance, not;
Still, for none other's would he change his lot.

FRIEND.

There's many a curious tale told of a serpent;
And I admire, in blankets, him or her pent;

But then, a hooded snake who pays the piper
With an embrace, oh! oh! the treacherous viper;
We'll wish you more luck when your judgment's riper.
I hate snakes. Those on bright Medusa's forehead
Must have appeared peculiarly horrid;
I know that Bryant shows their mystic meaning,
But he's, to my taste, much too fond of skreening
The heathen fooleries, and reports, as his doom
The whole but typified celestial wisdom.
But what of that? A cobra di capello
All must pronounce a most repulsive fellow.
In fact the man deserves to be in pond ducked
Who justifies a single serpent's conduct;
And only juries, ignorant of their fanging
Propensities, would spare them from a hanging.

AUTHOR.

Succeed? Oh, no! my Stoic master's text
If all would follow, none would be perplexed,
None be discomfited in heart or act,
If with desire their reason would compact;
Did they but will to master those alone
Which make by use a dungeon or a throne,
The passions and impulsions of the soul.
To act is ours; the event's beyond control.

Mishaps are angels oft in wanderers' guise;
And ships come home whose sails we filled with sighs;
Our fondest hopes full oft fate dares not realise;
And closed against our prayers His ear He keeps,
Whose eye, in mercy, "slumbers not, nor sleeps."

CRITIC.

You're coming to that point the Swedish queen
Push'd, as she sat two Jesuit monks between,
Who tried—but couldn't—to convert Christine.
If all things here be ordered for the best,—
A dogma by the first divines expressed,
And by all Churches held, both east and west,—
Your house in order set, your mind at rest;
The ultimate difference, it must be confessed,
'Tween those supposed extremes of good and evil,
So nice a point—would pose the very devil.
These being—good and evil—on the whole,
The terminations, as 'twere either pole,
Of the same central force, which all pervades,
The world of substance, and the world of shades;
For good may active now, now passive be,
But evil always is activity:
And better 'twere, it seems, we evil see,
Than good alone, without its agency.

The monks, not liking this encounter keen,
Conferred one moment, then implored the queen,
Her high and mighty Majesty Christine,—
Protesting that these views they saw great harm in,—
To read the works of Cardinal Bellarmine.
Her Majesty did nothing of the sort,
But strode her steed, and clattered out of court.
The conversation thus cut somewhat short,
Left by themselves, the pair, no more to do,
Monk number one winked at monk number two.
Says one, I wonder where she got that view;
Says t'other, blame me—if I thought she knew.

FRIEND.

Come, come; on ethics I am rather strong;
We'll not dispute now; but 'twould not take long
To show how lamentably she was wrong.

AUTHOR.

But you condemn all verse of solemn vein
As canting, tabernacular in strain.
By Nature's loveliest, sublimest law,
All high creative feeling ends in awe.
The higher thus our human reason soars
The lowlier still it humbles and adores;
And saint and seraph nearest to the throne,
Bow deeplier down than we beneath the sun.

'Tis poesie's most pure and proper part
To consecrate the soul and cleanse the heart;
To lead man's spirit up from earth to heaven,
Where frailty purified is sin forgiven;
Where at God's feet Time layeth down the sun,
And reason, worship, poesie are one.

CRITIC.

I'd not advise the poet to invade
The pulpit, nor derange the sermon-trade.
Go, study Nature; wander up and down
Street, court, and square of this distracted Town,
Rival of kingdoms in its population,
Its wealth an empire, and its poor a nation;
Where silver, gold, gems, treasures deck the windows,
And wealth, untempted, worse than starving sin does;
Where toiling thousands barter for their bread
A life that robs all future fate of dread;
Where vice, sin, crime, debt, death—

AUTHOR.

Spare, I beseech;
Blame—scold—advise! but do not, do not preach;
Your licence too is limited to teach.

FRIEND.

Crime's an offence 'gainst man, as sin 'gainst God,
And vice the medium and connecting rod.

AUTHOR.

Misled by writers in whose narrow view
All high is false, all low life only true;
Who own no taste as sound, nor purpose valid,
But what concerns the vile, or paints the squalid;—
Profoundest sciolists who proclaim with gravity,
That human nature simply means depravity;
Who think the apple off Truth's head they hit,
When, with malicious and left-handed wit,
Father and brother, husband, son, maid, wife,
And mother, all estates of human life,
They have denounced, each one for other's eye,
Washing the face with white hypocrisy:
Who versed immensely in low London life
Are always twiddling their dissecting knife,
And hacking social sores with fetor rife;
Who with their gross recitals think to harrow
Our souls, and melt us to the very marrow,
With words, like boulders shot out of a barrow,
So graphic and mellifluous seems the style
Of articles contracted for "per mile:"
Philosophers, who hold all evils owing
(Themselves without one ray their pathway showing),
To what they keep perpetually "don't know"-ing;
But, granting all were systemised confusion,
For this each holds his little quack solution;

Who, deep in surfaces, delight to show
How manfully mid shallows they can go;
Who, sin ignoring, gloriously conceive
The world's vast cure were—nothing to believe;
Such earnest lieges to their empress Reason,
They look on faith as logical high treason;
But urged by want of wit, which seems immeasurable,
Secrete, by process, to us, aught but pleasurable,
Out of their souls, a torpid admiration,
Of something not unlike a Possible Negation;
Conceived, by those who boast its comprehension,
To be much flattered by that kind attention
From cognate minds, whose happiest view consists
In holding God and man both pessimists;—
You, too, with the Aristarchi of our day,
Wild to be thought judicious, in your way;
Critics, whose lucubrations feast our eyes
In journals of the most portentous size;
Who, ignorant of all but native graces,
Like leopards lick and paw each other's faces
For love, with diabolical grimaces;
Who seek to gain our sympathies in chief
For heroes whose address would gall a thief;
Send one to study nature in blind allies,
(No doubt your taste with your instruction tallies,)

"No thoroughfares," and black and filthy slums
Where Nature—bar ill-nature—never comes:
And culs-de-sac where—if you once get in—
You are stifled with the reek of rags and gin.
This is not Nature, nor dear Nature's sin;
But laws unsocial, wherein, like to graves,
Drop, tribe by tribe, the poor machine-made slaves,
Who lose all root in Nature.

FRIEND.

True, alas!
It is long since such were noted, as a class,
(Let not e'en pity love of truth control)
For virtuous peace and purity of soul,
Or wide and well-thought views to guide the whole.
I speak not bitterly.

AUTHOR.

I hope not. Sure enough
There are those present probably quite poor enough.

CRITIC.

Who are the rich, who poor, one can't divine;
The difficulty is to draw the line.
A mendicant who begs, but pays his way,
From alehouse on to alehouse, through the day,
And finds he has still enough wherewith to settle
For his night's lodging, is a man of metal.

While city magnates, whatsoe'er their pride,
Whose income for their outlay don't provide,
And whose affairs are shortly after set
Forth—with the soul of wit—in the Gazette,
Are truly paupers. But, while poor men wealthy
Would oft be thought, there are who, rich and stealthy,
Seek, for their ease, of poverty the sign.
A man, in Wales, an artist in this line,
There lived, who owned, I think, a copper mine
And good estates, from which he yearly drew
Some thousands; more than, I am told, he knew—
Would never own that he was rich; nay, more,
It was his hobby to be reckoned poor.
Once at a concert—by good people given
To help some bouncing Magdalens to heaven,
Viâ the Cape—to play the violin,
By way of compensation for their sin,
Trombone, bassoon, or some such instrument,
He was invited, charitably, and went.
From hands and feet what thumping cheers would come
To greet his solo on the kettle-drum;
And ah! who else so exquisitely draws
Such feeling strains from catgut—such applause?
Poor pussies! Well, yours is a kindred cause;
For, as remarks Linnæus, on his oath,
'Tis "*miserè amant*" may be said of both.

Still, howe'er brilliant the performer's feats,
Success nor saint nor amateur always meets;
The outlay much exceeded the receipts.
O'erwhelmed with grief, our Crœsus went his way,
And waiting on the manager next day,
Protested he most anxious felt to free
The enterprise—so clearly meant to be
For public good—from liability.
(The unlucky speculator's hopes revive,
He thinks he means a ten-pound note, or five
At least.) Under these circumstances, he,
Instead of the accustomed guinea fee,
Wishing to show how liberal he could be
From sympathy—though times were hard enough,
And money now was valuable stuff—
Felt justified, and, on the whole, was willing
To take a pound;—he'd sacrifice the shilling.

FRIEND.

The tendency of time's so-called improvement,
Is to contract and lower the mind's movement;
To make the poor man poorer, and more like
The mere machine he tends, when not "on strike."
Mere poverty is no reproach to any;
The wise man may be poor, the rich a zany.
The wisest I have known—but one or two—
Were men "comparatively well-to-do."

AUTHOR.

Sometimes the poor uneducated mass,
Who know the wily way we have proceeded,
And the course pretexts power has always pleaded,
Think justlier than the rich or middle class :
And consequently you will find them far
Less maniacal on the Chinese war,
And such events, than other classes are.
They know who rule ; while we, who as a nation
A smuggler treat to ten years' transportation,
With contraband consistency enforce
On weaker countries that illegal course :
Lay waste their cities, claim and capture islands,
And then complain that treaties, by their vile hands
Attested, are not kept to the strict letter.
The poor, I must say, in these things know better ;
And many ignorant, who can scarcely read,
Have blushed for senates who approved the deed.

FRIEND.

Folks once were wiser ; now, it would appear,
Like hares, and elephants, "and such small deer,"
The people must go scranny once a-year ;
And if we have no more creditable labour,
We always can insult our next-door neighbour.
Some NOSMETIPSI bully of the press,
Who thinks the Foreign Office to distress

With envy at his better information,
Proceeds at large to stultify the nation
By stirring up an ignorant agitation
On things the public really nothing know of,
But whereupon he deems he's bound to show off.
Meantime, we once had news from Spain or Rome;
"Our specials," now, think as they think at home.
These scratch the wall, as in Paul's whispering gallery;
Those draw their inspiration with their salary.
So much for public business in the papers;
Enough to give all Donnybrook the vapours.

CRITIC.

This theme I, too, have studied, and confess,
The more I understand, I like it less.
In France the power abnormal of the press
Precludes all government, or did, until
'Twas made responsible by one wise will;
A cure quite capable of being used
In distant nations when the power's abused.
But as regards the two contrasted states
Of rich and poor, within our island gates,
'Tis sad to think, what most ameliorates
The latter most unfits for that position,
Born of necessity, a world-condition.

AUTHOR.

He only knows the sufferings of the poor
Who knows the sharp temptations they endure.
Mark how in every land the mighty mass
By honest labour dignifies its class;—
How few the faults that deepen into crimes,
Weighed with the woes and pities of the times.
Could any statist faithfully portray
The wants and hardships of one fleeting day,
And note the triumph that sublimes the strife,
Of famished virtue with the needs of life;
Of parents' struggle for their children's bread;
Of children for their household's reverend head;
The poor man's honour would secure esteem
From those who now but hold it as a theme
For artist's fiction and enthusiast's dream.
But they who deem the poor they represent
As harbouring universal discontent;
Who drivelling most on system, as it seems,
Right learned in the statute-law of dreams,
Outbid e'en Socialists in senseless schemes,
And libel Chartists in their mad extremes;
Who, poverty to paint, (taste's now so nice)
Their heroes load with every vulgar vice,
Alternating with logic of the schools,
All limping wits, or able-bodied fools,

Are either ignorant of what trash they write,
Or clumsy, flimsy, shabby shams indite.

FRIEND.

Here 's a strange mess for some of us to think on,
As quoth "the Devil," when he "looked o'er Lincoln."
And what a pleasant scheme you would invent,
The rich consistent, and the poor content.
But in our day, of days the most conventional,
Though, mumbling o'er Time's annals, you should mention all,
The lower you the scale of social life
Descend, the more 'tis with deception rife,
With fulsome cunning, arrogance, pretence,
And less simplicity and common sense
Than in those classes cultured and refined,
Where nature builds, and art upholds the mind.

AUTHOR.

The highest point of perfectness whereto
Attain can man, is Nature's state more true
Than that low pitch wherein the vile we view,
Or savages their powers who never knew.

FRIEND.

At best we but develop, not create;
Who most and best, show trueliest man's estate.

All knowledge is our birthright; weak or base
They who refuse the freedom of their race.

AUTHOR.

Nature in varied perfectness most lies;
Whose mind is most complete is least unwise.
He, the best artist, who can most comprise
Under one head, with personal restriction.

FRIEND.

The noblest character in modern fiction
Is in "My Novel," past all contradiction;
The princely refugee, I mean, named Riccabocca,
Who must e'en please, if not "dried up," "The Knickerbocker."
Talking of novels, when all's done and said,
We do our worst of penance through the head.
Could an additional labour be imposed
On him who so industriously closed
The list required—whereby is haply meant
The sun's course weekly through the firmament—
Why Hercules would rather be—with reason—
Hanged, drawn and quartered, as in case of treason,
Than undertake "the" novels of the season.
Figure that hero, with his arms a-kimbo,
Writhing in conscience, from the dread assurance
That he had earned, by bringing back from Limbo
Some three vol'd monster, base beyond endurance,

The everlasting hatred of the race,
Whose world he so had toiled to amend and grace;
Pity the cruel picture would efface.
Nor yet do nigger novels please—when read;
That dismal swamp of tales I view with dread.
Whose ever lot it is to read such through,
Is worse than any slave's of any hue.
True, Uncle Tom had merits, of their kind,
Contrasted aptly, and with grace combined.
Eliza's fearful footway o'er the ice
Was sketched with skill, with touch both bold and nice,
The black old man, and fair-haired little maid
Impressed us well, when side by side arrayed;
But—when old Bogey jingles in the garret—
It's awful; like "Hail, Mary," from a parrot.

CRITIC.

Let ranting blacks, who would to Canaan race,
Go! for them Jericho's the very place.

AUTHOR.

Not, therefore, in depicting knaves nor fools,
Nor sots, nor cheats, nor pettifoggers' tools,
Nor rogues convict, in our imagination,
The very cream—turned putrid—of creation;

Nor sickening simpletons whose silly souls
Seem just about a match for squeaking dolls,
Granting that noble piece of machination
Blessed for a moment with due animation,
True power of mind and genius shows; 'tis shown
In grand and high ideals; nor that alone,
But in adorning and adapting such
To veriest life. The gift grotesque of Dutch
Limners, who painfully will paint a wall
Rotting with age, and tottering to its fall;
Minutely marking every crumbling brick,
And where the mortar's thin, and where it's thick,
Shows false art's falsest folly; and that's all.

CRITIC.

You are travelling rather out of the record.

AUTHOR.

It matters not. As yet, not being bored
With any "name," I can (can you?) afford
To give a frank opinion upon that head,
Nor fear the frown of some pretentious Flat-head,
Who thinks, because he sells us every day,
Some forty yards of letter-press, his way
Of gathering gold-dust, (as the Colchians tried
Who stretched their fleece across the popular tide
Of stream auriferous) we must reverence pay

To his conceits; but that's not in the bill;
He trades his ware; I reverence where I will.

CRITIC.

And these are your opinions?

AUTHOR.

Yes, I own—

CRITIC.

Then keep them to yourself. Don't make them known;
The public won't endorse them.

AUTHOR.

Well, what then?

A reasonable minority of men
Shall like, perhaps, what yet is in my pen,
As justly as the literary populace,
While dragged through all the slush of the metropolis,
May laud their leaders. Wisdom comes with years,
Although not these the cause thereof appears;
Or wit, to age, is sadly in arrears.

CRITIC.

The poet's lot methinks, is doubly hard;
At best, behold a poor, and pensioned bard!
At worst; Oblivion folds him 'neath her wings,
And night and chaos cheer him, as he sings.

AUTHOR.

Wealth is a relative term, and means far less
What a man has, than what he would possess.
The pleasures that the wealthy highliest prize
Are oft but trifles in the poor man's eyes;
Nor can I reckon happiness one-sided,
But pretty equally 'twixt all divided.
The rich man knows he money has to spend;
The poor man is his match; he 's none to lend.
And joys there are, or less or greater, which
Are universal, both with poor and rich.
Hodge grips his wage, and grins with as much glee,
As counsel, when he banks his golden fee.

CRITIC.

Oh, the sensation, sweet as Yankee honey-dew
A man feels, when he's pocketed his money due!

AUTHOR.

Mere poverty is not so hard to bear;
In various shapes and shades it 's everywhere.
But absolute starvation makes philosophers
Of men who care not where it is they toss affairs
Of others, when they learn, from history's course,
The value of the ultimate law of force.
Why should not they, if possible, resume
What William outlawed by his book of Doom?

Were such a revolution justifiable,
Why not another equally appliable?
If that the Norman law could legalise,
Why not the English law this authorise?

FRIEND.

I did not think you such a frightful Radical.

AUTHOR.

Nor am I. Those are views that very sad I call,
And don't maintain. Bards live by keeping laws,
Obeying order, and high Order's cause;
Nor should one ill be ever made pretence,
Of justifying other like offence.
But who can tell, when once a theme is started,
Its course? more than a stag's when just uncarted?
The convolutions of the human brain
Match with the labyrinth 'mid the Cretan main;
Or with the maze at Hampton, where one sees
Placed in the middle, two tall central trees,
Reminding one of Adam and his wife
In Eden; tree of knowledge, tree of life.
And since you each have uttered many a parable,
Before you seek your acres, grass or arable,
I'll give you one—among us justly shareable.
A rich man, and a poor man, once, together
Trudged on a dusty road, through sultry weather:

The rich man with champagne his throat regales;
The beggar licks his lips, and thinks of ales;
The rich man stops at a hotel to dine,
Dyspepsia follows, helped by ropy wine,
The landlord "could commend as very fine;"
The poor man's board consists of bread and cheese,
But then his midday breakfast sits at ease;
And at a roadside spring, beneath some trees,
He gulps the pure stream from a rusty ladle,
In size between a crow's nest and a cradle.
The weary afternoon creeps on apace,
And each is in his self-assorted case.
The rich man never nears a tavern door
But takes "the draught and lotion, as before;"
His feet grow hot, swell, pain him more and more:
The tramp tramps on; he never feels footsore.
Now Gold-bag, slightly "sprung," begins to chatter
On corn and funds to Wind-bag; asks the latter,
What think you of "cash payments?" "It's no matter,"
Says Penceless, "what I think; I see so little
Of money; and am aye so scant of victual,
I know I'll die in Workhouse or the 'Spital."
The sun sets. Twilight deepens on their talk,
They scarce can see each other, where they walk.
Thieves! Robbers! shakes the rich man in his shoes;
The beggar whistles;—he has none to lose.

FRIEND.

These are, we understand, your social views,
You think the pauper's lot, with sense and health,
Better than vice and folly decked with wealth.

AUTHOR.

Exceptional, I grant; but not by stealth,
Need such opinions, that I know, be held;
What views we hold, to hold we feel compelled,
If honest, till to clearer sight anointed;
If sharp, till "their successors be appointed."
But note, whate'er his principles or plans,
I can't say I think much of any man's
Opinions; not, most surely, of my own;
The best are mutable, all transient known,
Yours may be mine, mine yours before we have done.
If one man knows life throughly, and can show it
Up to the light, that man of men's the poet.

FRIEND.

Pays for this privilege, I hope?

CRITIC.

Past doubt.
Ten million men toss; he's the odd man out.
Newmarket, "Sudden death;" all else we scout.

FRIEND.

There's nothing rivets great and wise intents
So firmly as a few discouragements.

AUTHOR.

Remember me to that select society
Whose members form such an unique variety—
As touching their opinions—of the race
To which their ignorant ancestry they trace.

CRITIC.

We'd introduce you, but that poets ever,
For mixed society, are far too clever.

FRIEND.

Stop; if you publish,—don't now be absurd—
But, if you wish for welcome, use no word
For which Reviewers will have cause to look
Beyond the fifth page of their spelling book,
Where halt they must o'er many a frightful syllable,
Their sluggish organs to pronounce are ill able.
Think also what a favourable step some
Poets might take by "ripping out" at Epsom,
Just when The Derby's over; then's your time
To stun Creation with some racy rhyme,
Says Rhadamanthus of the leading Journal,
Whose puny judgeship in the Courts infernal
Of Criticism, makes poor minstrels mourn all;

Such being the ideal audience you,
As bard, should ever keep in mental view.
Says a professor sage, whose works,—well-nigh
All margin to the intellectual eye,
Illustrate well the rule he scribbles by,—
Write nothing that's reflective; or requires
More than the ballad-monger's crowd desires;
Thought's an eccentric act, and quickly tires;
All meaning is, to song, with ruin fraught;
Pure poesie consists in lack of thought;
Thought's culpable, it risks the public peace,
And may commit you with the new police.
With this advice, so true, and well worth marking,
Your crazy craft I leave you to embark in;
I scarce should be surprised, if, while you flounder
Just half seas over, we should watch you founder.

AUTHOR.

I question if the chambers of my brain,
Of your advice one quarter would retain,
E'en if I thought to store it as all gain.
My blood is just midway 'twixt steam and ice;
And if nor over rough, nor over nice,
I'm not so desperate as to take advice.

FRIEND.

'Twere base to take advantage unawares;
But prudence for contingencies prepares;

It's only wise to fit oneself to make
A step, we may no less decline to take.

AUTHOR.

My moral instincts tell me what to do,
What write, what read, judge, seek for, or eschew.
I've learned to look all arguments in face,
And deem their value in each special case,
By principles to which their rise they trace.
With neither thought nor word I rest content
Until I've torn off all integument;
Externals only satisfy the mind
Feeble, or idle, or to err inclined.

CRITIC.

The question is, 'What's not external,' here;
And, how it is, an essence can appear?
Essences we indeed believe to be,
Just as the righteousness of saints we see,
Fold upon fold but veils their sanctity.
Has Kant or Berkeley lifted up the curtain?
We begin with postulates, that is certain.

FRIEND.

I can't support the Berkleyans; with them
The universe is just a theorem.
Mass there is none in all the orbs of Heaven,
More than the B. C. D.'s in Euclid given,

That line and point mark in a diagram;
The external world is all a solemn sham;
Matter's a mere suggestion.

CRITIC.

So it seems;
Things never are so real as in dreams:
And thus we find the cost of following out
The endless deviation of one doubt.

FRIEND.

Locke's 'nought but matter,' Berkeley's 'nought but mind'
Are paths whereon the Atheists crowd, we find.
The one reduces to a mere illusion
Our notion of God's Being; to confusion
The other brings His moral government,
Past, or to come. Time, motion, space, extent,
Are things God makes for sake of argument.
Here's fiction surely; worthier who could name,
Whereon for rollicking balladist to declaim?

AUTHOR.

I grant you 'tis the bard's most serious aim,
Fiction and truth to reconcile with fame.
But whatsoe'er I prove, on this depend:
Ambition, based on power, achieves its end.

The man of true ambition lives to find
A throne in every purpose of his mind;
His ends may be obstructed, but he sees
A crown, and crowns himself, in each he compasses.
Now, revel in your Bradshaw. Trace your train
From town to country, down and up again:
Since railroads were invented, all must own
Life has more "ups" and "downs" than ere was known.
Mark where the gross ascetics of your line
Three minutes lend to lunch, and six to dine;
Where branch, loop, feeder consummate their junction,
Or the grand trunk pursues its lonely function,
Whereon, by virtue of perpetual unction,
Your cometary course you take, resigned;
And leave progressing stations far behind.
Beside the railway all are truly sham ways;
There's nothing equals traction upon tram-ways.

CRITIC.

Our time is just expiring, and you know
I have a little journey I must go;
It's only fifty miles or so, by rail,
To an old farm-house in a calm green vale,
Where Medway gropes through bowery banks and steep,
With, here, a hop-yard; there, a fold for sheep;
There great red oxen graze themselves asleep.

Here stands the church, and there the lordly hall,
And there the shades of feudal ruins fall;
Here corn-fields yellowing rustle in the ear,
There orchards mellowing hint of merrier cheer.
I know a pair of white and tiny feet,
Impatient, pattering round the lawn, to meet
One long expected; jealous of the hours,
Ere, like a fairy fountain, welling flowers,
She flings her prattle round me. Well I know
The rapture I can cause, and she shall show,
When bounds the golden ball along the room,
Light as the woven wind of Indian loom;
Charmed with the gilded film that floats in air,
She half expects it means to settle there.
Soon shall I hear,—hear twice, hear thrice—the whole
Legend of Gipsey, and her frolic foal;
Of faithful Dash, and how he lost an eye
In battling with a strange dog, valiantly;
Of Snow, and her twin kittens;—only think!—
One white as milk, and one as black as ink;
How, too, the hunted stag rushed through the farm,
And in the hen-house saved himself from harm,
While all the gallant red-coats, man and beast,
Dear Rosie thought the army of the East;
The last and strangest dream she ever dreamed,
And, what a monstrous star that meteor seemed;

But psha! I'm reckoning now the tales I've heard,
While just five hundred fresh things have occurred,—
As I shall find, when perched upon my knee,
She opes the budget of her news with glee.
Therefore, no more. She waits. And, if I've time,
These wretched verses wriggling into rhyme—
To read, I'll scan with care; and, on return,
Will honestly advise you; print,—or burn.

AUTHOR.

Well, there's no help for it, I go—Good day—
To play at work.

FRIEND.

And we to work at play.

AUTHOR.

An easy lot, whichever light we view it in;
Nothing to do, and all one's life to do it in.

THE NEMESIS OF NATIONS.

Deep in earth's caverned heart, I see her now—
The Nemesis of Nations. Stern she sits
Her monumental throne. The hush of death
Spreads round her like a halo. She is girt
With silence, as a girdle. Even Hope
Might deem her dead. Yet lives she; live she will.
She hath a vital secret in her breast,
As though she nursed a god, which scarcely breathes,
The freedom of the future. To all else
Superior in that secret, nought beside
Heeds she; but hears, indifferent, o'er her head
The ebb, or flow, of empire; and the march
Of many a generation; and but smiles,
And rocks her foot, contemptuous. Not for these
Moves she; nor is she moved; nor doth she watch.
Dumb prophetess of woe! she hath not been
Incarcerate; nor abandoned; nor beguiled;
Nor, of the good, suspected; nor, by kings,
Ever forgot;—if, haply, one hath eyed,
Nor, shuddering, shrunk before that stately stare,

Her pale and dominant brow, and mounded breast,
Elate with life:—nay, she hath never been
Save by her own serene and sacred will
Exiled from Earth's face. What, then, doth she there,
Darkling, in central solitudes? Alas!
Of her divine prevision all devoid,
Unworthy suitors hath she, many an one,
Who her to forfeiture would tempt, nor own
God's gracious gift, empowering her to abide
The hour of destiny. But when the dew,
Now wet, hath ripened to the thunder-cloud,
And man's breath to God's lightning, one shall come,
And ope her sealéd hand;—take out the spell
And put in it a spear; and sanctify
Her forehead with a crown; and wreathe her loins
With silver serpents; and so lead her forth
To head reviving manhood. Would to Heaven
I, too, might see the awakening of that day,
Day-dawn, or sun-down, speed it, God of right!

WAR.

So heathen against heathen, tribe 'gainst tribe,
Streamed onward in embattled waves of war;
Not that so vast, to immemorial age
Sacred, of Scythic birth, which flood-like surged
Far round the mount Armenian; nor so wide
Which once the crutchéd hermit's eyes beheld,
Uprist in bodily answer to his prayers,
By Danube's bank, whence hardy knighthood's shield;—
Nor host immixed that by Propontic wave
Its ranks deployed, by nations, to salute
The golden-footed dame, who sheathed in steel
Her lilied breast, and couched her lance for love
Of Christ; and, with the hope of wresting back
From infidels, His hallowed tomb, led on
With jewelled rein, and morion snowy plumed,
Her maiden chivalry, and glittering queans,
Luckless; for ah! their virgin valour quailed,
Ere yet the manlier might of stern Islam
Bounded upon the spoil; nor, till unhorsed,
Unhelmed, knew these the delicate foe they proved,

Flower breath'd, as in the moon of blossoms earth;—
Nor that, by gay Chalons, where fell the force
Moorish beneath the Frankland monarch's mace,
Which Europe saved from turban and Koraun;—
Nor those above whose heads the flaming sword
Two handled, and two edged with pest and fire,
Of militant angel, pierced the clouds and slew,
At one stroke, squadrons. Thus, for many an age,
Prevailed the universal lust of death,
And vulgar slaughter; war, of all bad things
Worst, and man's crowning crime, save when for faith,
Or freedom waged, but when for greed of ground,
And mere dominion, cursed of man and God.
And people against people rose, and wronged
Each one the other; robbed of land or life;
As when the clans Mogul, which late had left
Their maze of mountains the high plains that bound
Whence Buzanghir, and all his valorous brood,
Heads of the golden horde, and sons of light,
Whom Alancova to her sun-spouse bare,
At treble birth, the lords of throne and crown,
Khaliph's, or king's, or Tzar's, which Zinghis gained,
Or filial Kublai, with all suasive sword—
Bright ravisher of souls—into one realm,
Rounded, and died; strict Theists they who held
In God and their own swords, a brief, brave creed,—

O'er Europe's quaking heart careered, and like
Sunblast on greensward, graved their fiery name
In blazing towns and harvests blackening; woke,
With tramp terrific of their horses' hoofs,
The slumbering nations; to its stony foot
Burned Breslaw; and at Wollstadt won a field
Red with the gore of Christian chivalry,
But fled from their own conquest, fled aghast,
And perished in the wilds where they were born;—
And when, in later times, and distant lands
By sumless crimes indignant made, distraught,
The Azteks, for their lord and woe-crowned head,
Stern Moctezuma, archer of the heavens—
Beset by bigots, falsely named white gods,
Their deeds of black fiends rather savouring,
But, steel-clad cowards, strong in fulminant arms,
Instalments thought of thunder at command,
By the plume mailed barbarians, gold who held
The sun's bright tearlets—sought in vain to buy
Humanity of Christians, infidel
These to earth's purest creed;—or southwards, where
His quadripartite world the Ynga ruled,
Earth's universal passion wasting not
On king-faced coin, but hallowing every mote
To beauty, or to deity, till came
Crowding, the guests profane, with priest and cross,

Who slaughtering thousands of his flock, and him
Incarcerating, bade pile his prison walls
With the soul-soiling dross they hungered for,
Ere he should know release, his sole release
Death. The Invader vaunted him of wrongs,
And gloried in the havoc of his hand.
And victor after victor vexed the world;
With scythéd chariots mowed the fields of blood
Cities of wealth and states despoiled of peace;
Red rapine reaped the land, and famine fed;
While maid and mother, eld and childhood ate
The heart of grief and drank the tears of woe.

A FRAGMENT.

And Zetland where, betimes, some ruthless wight
Scaling the scaur, in sport the nests despoils
Of auk or gull; they, crowding clamorous round,
Intruded on, insulted, injured, sore
Besiege his ears, until with querulous wing,
One stern and ancient fowl assails his eyes;
His hold gives way; he topples headlong down,
From crag to crag rebounding, till the sea,
For many a ghastly loan responsible,
Seals up the expiring secret; and, avenged,
God's feathered kind scream triumph; him, at home,
Or dame, or mother, by her drowsy wheel,
Expects; and sharpens, through the ominous night,
Her ears, to catch his customary step
Whose ghost now flaunts the breakers, or, far off,
Lamps the lone wold. Or, where, by Jura's isle,
Fond mermaid, hybrid of the earth and sea,
Than fair haired Yseult vainer of her locks,
Erect amid the waves, on caudal curve
Poises her form, weed-girdled; in her hand

Her shadow glassed; she, rivals knowing none,
Beckons the youth belated in his skiff,
Far out of hail of land; seductive, lauds
The quiet cave, surpassing, in sweet gloom,
Earth's superficial glare; her bridal home;
The charm immortal of the foamy sea;
Her dower of pearl and amber; wide domain,
And every joy; oft, over shoulders white
Showering her shining tresses, which, as oft,
The lapping waves displace; but he,—with fear
Half dead, though scarce incurious of the deeps,
Nor to adventure, mostly, disinclined,—
Rows faster, lest the moon set, till he hears
His heart's betrothed, him wailing on the beach.

THE PASSING BELL.

Hark! 'tis the passing bell;
While the soul is on its way,
While it waves its upward wings,
We yet may pray.

Pray for the good man's soul;
He is leaving earth for heaven;
And it soothes us to feel that the best
May be forgiven.

Pray for the sinful soul;
It fleëth we know not where;
But wherever it be, let us hope;
For God is there.

Pray for the rich man's soul;
Not all be unjust, nor vain;
The wise he consoled; and he saved
The poor from pain.

Pray for the poor man's soul;
The death of this life of ours,
He hath shook from his feet; he is one
Of the Heavenly powers.

Pray for the old man's soul;
He hath laboured long; through life
It was battle, or march; he hath ceased,
Serene, from strife.

Pray for the infant's soul;
With his spirit's crown unsoiled,
He hath won, without war, a realm;
Gained all, nor toiled.

Pray for the struggling soul;
The mists of the straits of death
Clear off; in some star-bright isle
It anchoreth.

Pray for the soul assured;
Though it wrought in a gloomy mine,
Yet the gems it earned were its own,
That soul divine.

Pray for the simple soul;
For it loved, and therein was wise,
Though itself knew not; but with Heaven
Confused the skies.

Pray for the sage's soul;
'Neath his welkin wide of mind,
Lay the central thought of God,
Though undefined.

Pray for the high, the mean;
Souls are of equal birth;
Let thoughts be the joy of the world,
And end of earth.

Pray for the souls of all,
To God, and His holy Son,
That, filled with the Spirit Divine,
All may be one.

Hush! for the bell hath ceased;
And the spirit's fate is sealed;
To the angels known; to man
Left unrevealed.

THE END.

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